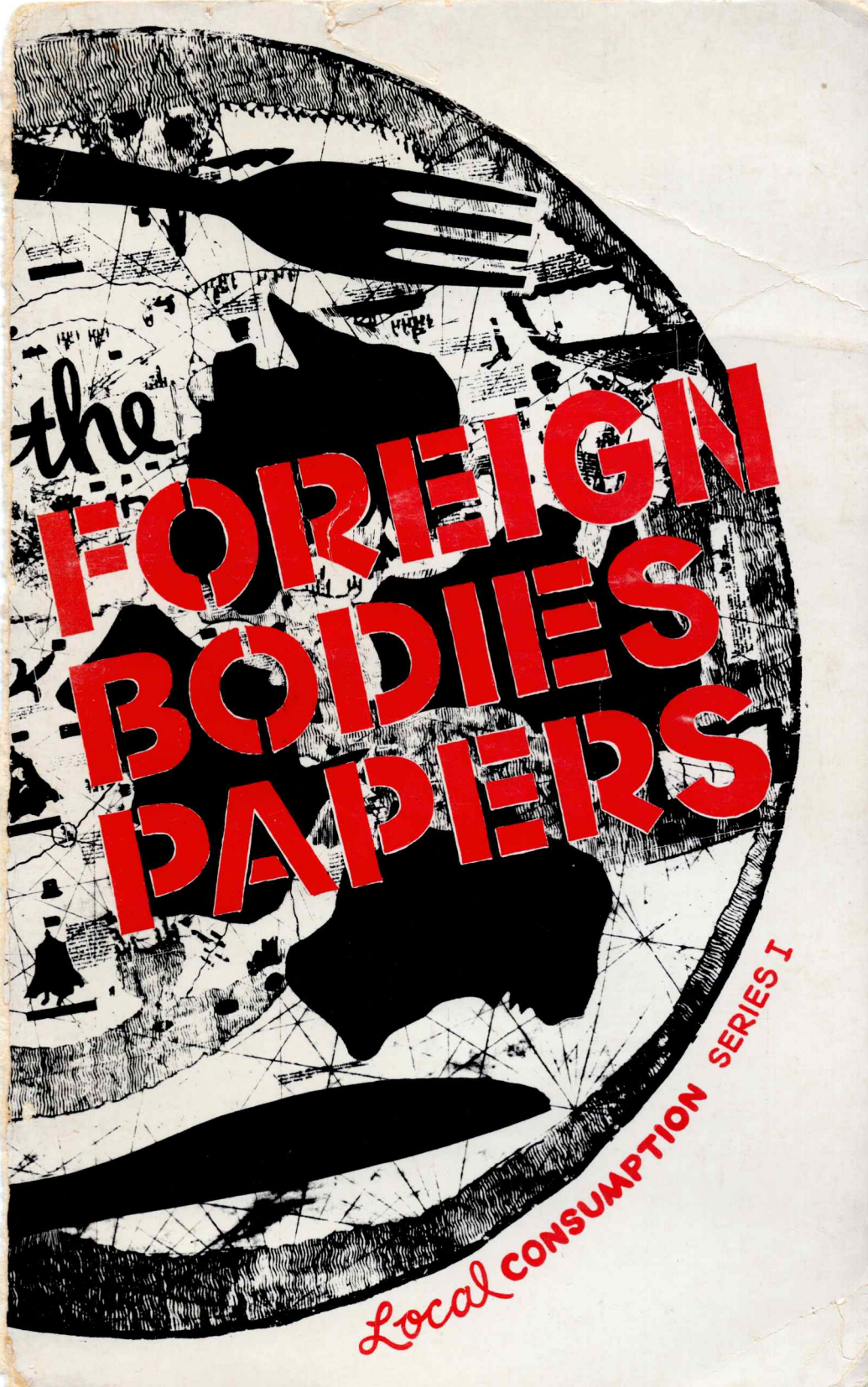
the
FOREIGN
BODIES
PAPERS
Local CONSUMPTION SERIES I

intervention

P.O. Box 395, Leichhardt, N.S.W. 2040, Australia.

Intervention is an Australian political journal which addresses both the organised left and activists in radical social movements. It publishes theoretical work, as well as analyses of local issues, informed by marxist as well as non-marxist approaches.

Intervention 15, (available September), will be a special issue devoted to the Media. Its contents include:

—W.Bonney on Media Ownership
—A.Stephens on the History of Advertising
—T.Rowse on Cultural Policy
—T.O'Regan on *Screen*
—C.Merewether & L.Stern on Film and Aboriginal History
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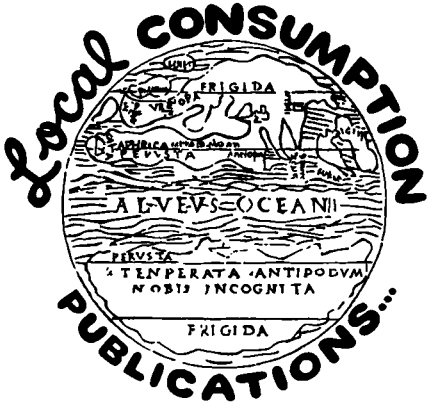
Intervention 16, (available December), will be a general issue featuring a symposium on Connell and Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History*. This will include replies by the authors. Other articles may include R.Poole on Right Wing groups in Australia,and G. Crought on multi-national corporations.

Intervention 17, planned for early 1982 will be a special issue dealing with aspects of the current theoretical and political status of marxism. It will take up some of these issues which have come to prominence since the early 1970's, and which pose problems for marxist theory and practice. Contributions are invited. Address proposals to J.Allen, P.Patton or R.Poole, School of History, Philosophy & Politics, Macquarie University. Deadline 1st Nov. 1981.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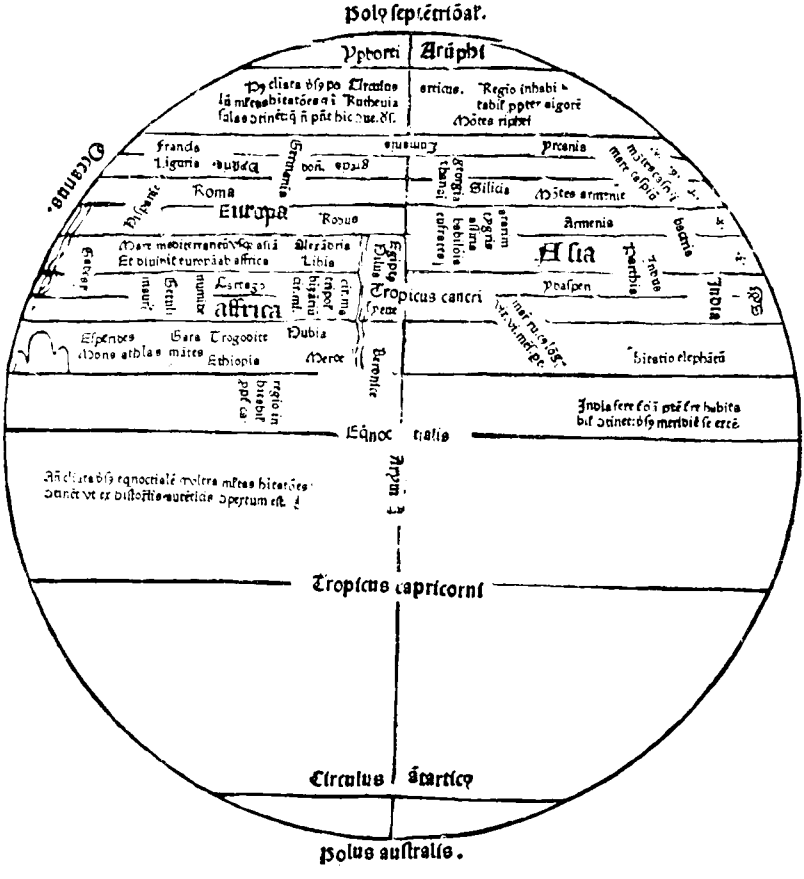

Map of the world by Petrus de Aliaco (c.1483). Courtesy Mitchell Library.

THE FOREIGN BODIES PAPERS

Edited by
Peter Botsman, Chris Burns and Peter Hutchings

Local Consumption Publications

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Preface

I

Over the last ten years, both within traditional institutions and outside them, we have witnessed a struggle to come to terms with theoretical practices which have been challenging the familiar economies of historicist, empiricist and realist conceptions of knowledge. Across the scope of the humanities, work by such figures as Althusser, Foucault, Barthes etc. has promised, and to some extent achieved major changes. Marxist practices of analysis, the 'teaching of literature' and social and political studies have been confronted with new ideas and alternatives. The claims to an unquestioned right of explanation of such knowledges as history, sociology and literature are to some extent confronted.

However, the proposition that there is no arena for the development and exchange of this progression of ideas and conflicts in Australia would be greeted by some as understatement. For others, the nature and status, for example, of the work of the above-named theorists and other contemporary developments 'between, outside and within' the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences still remains something of a mystery. It is at these junctures that the *Local Consumption Collective* has been formed. The initial project is to produce a series of books dealing with modes of analysis which are either taboo or not known within most institutions for the production and circulation of ideas and knowledges.

Given this set of priorities, the publication of *"The Foreign Bodies Papers"* seemed a logical move. *The Foreign Bodies Conference Semiotics in/and Australia* (Feb 81) produced an interesting set of ideas about past and future theoretical directions. As the word "foreign" denotes, the ideas dealt with are not widely recognised in Australia. What is significant and

challenging about *The Foreign Bodies Conference* is that the papers and the conference were defined not in relation to current institutions and disciplines, but towards a notion of the "foreign". Whether this term is allowed to fall or stand in the future, the foreign bodies papers share with Local Consumption a desire to move towads unexplored territory: that is, if unexplored territory existed ahead of the explorers' reconstructions of it.

However some qualifications and comments need to be added to these choices and strategies. The Foreign Bodies Conference produced a remarkably diverse set of papers. Ranging from poetry to epistemology, the papers are indicative of an array of theoretical conceptions and priorities. We don't want to tame the differences which occurred both at the conference and in the papers by claiming to represent a broad-based and aligned theoretical movement. At the present, it is more important to underline and acknowledge differences and disagreement. However the fact we think differences and diverse sets of priorities must be acknowledged doesn't mean we're going to fall into the illusion of editorial democracy or pluralism. Local Consumption is not about providing a general freedom of speech— it is about providing the conditions for certain types of speech. This is not a policy of exclusion— but an acceptance of limitations. The diversity of the foreign bodies papers bears witness not to the fertility and inherent liberality of certain categories of origin ("France", "semiotics") but to the specific and localised nature of the counter-strategies made possible by the work of certain contemporary theorists. All of this, of course, raises problems with the notion that those who speak in the name of Foucault etc. comprise a unified coalition in opposition to established practices.

The problemitization of a 'unified voice' must also problematize the notion of 'marginalism'. The ease with which the potentially subversive sort of work cited in the foreign bodies papers is appropriated by familiar, and solidly entrenched positions like, say, "avante-guardism", "new wave" or "libertarianism", questions the idea that it is possible to get "outside" institutions to a marginal position of 'freedom' and 'counter-terrorism'. Such a position of freedom does not and cannot exist; except for those who construct their own self fulfilling descriptions/boundaries/exclusion, and then jump over them/through them. Notions of marginalism and/or freedom are themselves ideologically and institutionally bound and create their own anachronistic and defeatist slogans: "We speak in the name of...." "Our existence is representative of...", "We are creative, important, subversive etc. because we exist outside...",

"We are the spontaneous eruption of outside forces". We resist locating ourselves as marginal (and the slogans that come with such a tag) if only to acknowledge that the formation of Local Consumption is the formation of another institution (with its own inbuilt exclusiveness/exclusions, priorities and targets) aiming to provide the conditions, and a context for certain sorts of interventions and works.

A lot of the commotion which accompanies projects like Local Comsumption's concerns the controversial and much quoted term: "semiotics". The notion that we want to dispense with immediately is the understanding that something called semiotics, the theory of signs, can offer some set of uniform, methodological solutions in many differing areas. Semiotics, understood in this way, compounds the whole bundle of universalist fantasies and idealist conceptions of knowledge which we will seek to avoid. If such a conception were entertained, strategies for the recognition of the important (new?) area/methodology semiotics would have to be devised, introductions and summaries would be written. A manifesto somehow representative and useful in every area in which semiotics was thought to be operable would have to be formulated. To advocate this would be to fall into a repetition of the strategy which says: the powers that be in traditional disciplines and institutions must recognise the validity and insights of our remarkable new theory: like contestants in a beauty contest we must convince the judges. This pushes to one side any strategies of intervention or practice. The structure for work and contributions are set in advance. Against this we maintain that it must be finally recognised that there can be no underlying manifesto or methodology capable of working through the diverse areas (fine arts, literature, sociology etc.) which some proponents of semiotics often assume as unified.

If the Foreign Bodies Papers as a consolidated block testify to any one thing then it's to the dangers of assuming or constructing false unities: that there is or has ever been a 'unified semiotics' employable in all areas of knowledge, and of falling into the trap of believing that by constructing familiar sketches of culture as origin— old world as humanising, liberating balm on our colonial sores, —or by constructing a new discipline, (semiotics), we are in some way combatting established mediums for the deployment and production of knowledge and power. To state the obvious: advances made in particular areas of study may have nothing whatever to contribute in other fields. If we are to avoid, as Ted Colless notes, "a banal re-run of a vanguardism, that even in its hey-day was nothing but a useful fiction", then differences and

divergences must be acknowledged. At the present time, it serves no useful purpose to set up some sort of theoretical centre or manifesto which will satisfy everybody who calls themselves "semioticians" or who are interested in "French theory". The Side FX meetings (which endeavoured to set up common theoretical bases for future reading and study groups in Sydney) seemed to flounder because of the assumption that 'everybody had something in common'. There were obviously other reasons for the failure of the Side FX projects, but the fact that there was no manifesto forthcoming (or possible) is important for the formulation of Local Consumption's publishing and editorial strategies: it seems far more productive to acknowledge the diversity of work and differences in opinion which surround present theoretical work than to ignore them.

It is also important to reject economic and social conspiracy theories about contexts in which semiotics, french theory and other work have made useful but largely ignored contributions and interventions. A popular view seems to be that the innate conservatism of Australian intellectual scenarios, institutions and society has universally suppressed any attempt to write theoretically innovative and potentially threatening discourses. Another view is that there is some irreconcilable blockage in the translation of french into english. These views amount to something like: the atmosphere in the southern hemisphere is all wrong for innovative work to progress or that there is something about Australia in general that blocks certain theory. We have no doubt there are still any number of philosophers, historians and writers whose basic metaphysical formula and circular defense of their own work is: a chair is a chair is a chair: one must merely open one's window and view the world: thus the world is on the side of/represented by my work. No doubt also, there are many who, like E.P. Thompson, associate so-called "french theory" with an impending plague of locusts. However it seems ridiculous to consider the image of such personages locked arm in arm or holding secret meetings for the overthrow of all that is non-empirical. As we reject the claim for a 'total theory', we also reject speaking to Australia as some sort of unified whole. If there are theoretical or cultural blockades they are specific, concerned with local trainings and institutional situations. Such blockades are best dealt with separately and specifically.

The endpoint to these arguments is a contradiction which we will not try to resolve. On the one hand, we see an important need for the acknowledgement and publication of theory from many diverse and sometimes unrelatable areas; on the other hand, there can be no manifesto or unified strategy capable of

representing these different priorities and working areas. The logical question then is: What are Local Consumptions on-going strategies and priorities? How will it at once acknowledge a diversity of theoretical positions and at the same time avoid unifying them by the very act of publishing them? Our position clearly does not entail that we become some sort of amorphous or pluralist body. It merely requires that there will be changes to our editorial and publishing strategies from time to time. Hopefully there will be a few surprises in our format and what we publish. This doesn't mean that we're advocating anarchism or that we're suggesting that Local Consumption be engulfed in an endless play of multiplicities, a semiotic sea. Perhaps what it does mean however, is that were not pretending to speak or give voice to everybody. We are not going to avoid strong editorial lines and we don't pretend to want to print everything that comes into our hands. At best, Local Consumption hopes to set up problems, devise targets and play some part in devising and making known new analytic, theoretical and writing practices. The tentative future program for Local Consumption includes discussions of new developments in English political theory and their implications for Australian sociological and political analysis. Articles have been promised on operative power structures and discourses in legal representation and practices; and on medicine, sex education, literary theory and a social work perspective on Donzelot's *The Policing of the Family*. Local Consumption also welcomes suited film scripts, work in film theory and film reviews and commentaries. Short pieces of writing will also be recieved. We'd welcome your response to the Local Consumption collection, and articles should be sent (in typed form) to Box 116, Wentworth Bldg., Sydney University 2006.

Peter Botsman
Rick Phillips

II Anecdotes of Terrorism: gossip from the metropolis.

I need hardly say that we were delighted and amused at the typical english way in which our ideas were misunderstood. They took our epigrams as earnest and our parodies as prose.

— Gilles Deleuze to Felix Guattari,
overheard in a parisian McDonalds.

Is this where you live? asks the radio. This morning we re-read the introduction to *Random Issue* 1 (a kind of theoretically correct *Punch* for those who never read it), and noted the estimable awareness of literary tradition the editors displayed in providing us with an antipodal simulacrum of Stephen Dedalus' northern address, and their theoretical awareness in then repudiating it.

Where do you live? in those deserts that haunt us; where figures of the void wander lost in the shimmering heat-haze of George St., or perhaps, turning our backs on the figure of the *flâneur*, we could take up residence in the uncompromising light of the sub-tropical. We hear rumours on the bush telegraph.

But the telegraph is rarely effective, and we are accused of centralism. Communication is more problematic than it may appear. It is not a problem of distance: the boomerang crescent is also a geography of taste, and it is often taste that divides us. Taste: an important word when we consider the title of this collection.

When I look at the map and see what an ugly country australia is, I feel that I want to go there and see if it cannot be changed into a more beautiful form!

— Lex Luthor.

Just as the image of the desert was well and truly refurbished at *The Foreign Bodies Conference,* so the libertarian past of Sydney is re-manufactured: whether it's to provide us with what Ted Colless calls "fictions of speed" or to characterise from afar the (at least in other points on the boomerang) de-contextualized activity of Fun City (of the parties, the glebe gulag...). For all the talk about fluid identities, each point on the boomerang revolves

around its past. The guide-books of gossip and fame are authoritative.

The tales drift back: stories of incomprehension. Perhaps we should investigate importation at a minute level, though to do this would be to fragment us even further. *But who's that*? In her paper, Meaghan Morris discusses the problems of the Audience: are we/you writing to a hostile reader, a reader-in-the-know, or a reader-wanting-to-know? The semiotics of the unaddressed letter, a message-in-a-bottle from a desert island.

This year's poised anaemia
competes with last year's schizophrenia
for the pleasure of being next year's text.

— Laurie Duggan.

Terrorism: bearing the burden of someone else's silence; their silence silencing you, or forcing you to speak for them from amidst the rags of your own silence. Catatonia isn't an exit that everyone can take. All this is familiar; if it hasn't happened to you then you've read about it, and not just in the gossip columns. Philosophic discourse is inevitably virilizing we are told. The cudgels multiply and become more respectable.

The Sins of Omission. The images are difficult to overcome and old rhetorics die hard. Perhaps the omissions should be forgotten and the positive aspects of what is here investigated. Of course this sounds dangerously like making a virtue of necessity...

The Sins of Omission: perhaps if one subjected this piece to a symptomatic reading it would be possible to discover the traumatic event in our common past. To paraphrase Edward Said: theory from the point-of-view of its victims. As we write this, a tape is playing in the background, a tape of the last session of the conference. It's very noisy because everybody kept on moving their chairs; we shifted nervously in ours, or rocked autistically. We've only listened to it twice since it was recorded and that is enough.

The gallery of silence expands. Juliet Mitchell's hostile

reception, the frozen poses of Side F/X, the forthcoming issues of journals that never arrive...

Power is not a foreign body...

— Bernard-Henri Lévy.

Institutions and their denizens: stories of exile. "A hard coming they had of it." We watch the sad demise of radical philosophy departments and take our place *outside* linking up with the "eternal underground" of the marginalized. But sometimes it's better to be out than in, not because of the joys of delinquency for its own sake, but because often the provision of an institutional place tends towards solidification and sterility: rehearsals of theories developed and outlined elsewhere, rather than the use of these "theories" in a loose way which breaks from a conception of them as "theories", and moves towards a use of them as "tools for analysis", as Foucault suggests (a suggestion ignored by so many "foucauldians", if such creatures should be said to exist).

The Great Australian Bite: in a country which has known nothing else but capitalism and "barbarism", isn't consumption a way of life? Taking bites out of the country, consuming its natives, and, when our local production is insufficient (as it so often is or is seen to be), importing objects for consumption. A problem: do rats get to our imports *en route*? What is the Sydney-Paris nexus? Questions not posed solely for their rhetorical value, nor to be answered right now, but perhaps questions to be pursued in a debate of which Foreign Bodies and Local Consumption are only continuations: a debate that begins (in a literary context) in 1856 with Frederick Sinnett. Also, a debate which is potentially consuming in itself: perhaps we, as consumers of these "imports", should be less concerned with consuming them than with taking off from them, and using these imports as tool-boxes.

Then the problems of the "imported" become solely one of whether or not they work, whether or not they describe existing australian situations, not whether they have been "properly" transported.

Chris Burns & Peter J. Hutchings.

Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum

Paul Foss

Oscar Wilde once tried to make peace with an art which is all lies. For him romanticism was good art because it gives itself as nothing other than deception. But this did not mean it turns irresponsibly away from life. Having no need to be *of* the real, paradoxically, is precisely what makes it true. It speaks the truth of the lie. Naturalism, on the contrary, was bad art in that it pretends to be what it is not. Always given as an appearance of something else, it implicates reality as one of its own effects. And that speaks the lie of truth.

Now Wilde is being more than decorous here. In fact, he begins to approach the open and dangerous perspective of pure imagination. In his *Decay of Lying* a theme is posed which will later come to emerge (a line of thought culminating in Baudrillard) as "the precession of simulacra". [1] All abstraction, all romance, he effaces the gap existing between image and real, so that the first is no longer able to refer to the other. Thus his famous formula: *"Nature follows Art"*. Even Nature, he argues, is an invention of art. One only "speaks true" by confusing reference with the order of appearance. When all is said and done, however, nothing underlies appearances except their power to fascinate or to dazzle. The reality of images is always the reality of seduction. Beyond that, there are merely lies, unreality and finally, iconoclasm.

A quite inspired nonsense, for with one fell swoop every image system is toppled into the void of its own ideal perspective. Take the example (*"of Japanese things. Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. If you set a picture by Hokusai or Hokkei, or any of the great native painters, beside a real Japanese gentleman or lady, you will see that there*

is not the slightest resemblance between them. The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, that are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extra-ordinary about them. In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.")[2] For the nineteenth century aesthete, Japan only existed in the picturesque or exotic image by which it was viewed as such, and nowhere else. And in the space separating abstract from concrete: what? As he says, the whole temper of the age. Movements of idealisation following in the wake of Japan's entry into the European sphere of activity, a Japan no longer fierce, untamable, anti-western or inscrutable like an opaque sphere, but tamed through the circulation of a different image, more proximate, transparent and approachable: art rushes in where merchants fear to tread; an image presenting Japan as opulent, luxurious, an inroad for suitable exchange. A self-reflection in the eye of exotica. If Wilde's vision is taken a little further, then it is possible to see this image returning today as the refuse of our own creation. The tables aptly turned, Japan is now the new lion of capitalism. And who knows what would be necessary to block out its trampling flow, the roar of Toyotas, the storms of cameras clicking and returning the image a million-fold?

All the above is by way of an introduction to another piece of nonsense. It too is a lie: the lie that forces the truth out into the open. It is this: *The whole of Australia is pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.* Perhaps an illusion to which we are all so close as to be blind to it, to the power of its destiny. And I do not think it only a personal chimera on my part, though not once did I feel anything but (a)part of (from) it. It was always there before me like some mirage of my own making. Yet I have ventured into this territory, with its unknown and searing plains, knowing that at any moment I might evaporate into nothing, and in the image of so many others. A drama of the disappearing explorer? Undoubtedly. But I could not help thinking throughout, that somewhere outback in the deserts of the country lay a centre which continues to compell everything towards it. And that what I would see at last reflected there, as in the mirror of myself, is our endless unimaging.

> Sunset in the suburbs, and the emptiness of the continent drifts in, like the emptiness of the moment after "Gooday" has been spoken by an Australian to a stranger. This Australian has no ties with any other

> Australian in the form of words; he has no recognition signals apart from the absence of words. He has no ties except the emptiness and the silence. It is a continent of dreams we inhabit, a waiting continent. All who have set foot in its bush, its lonely places, know that silence. The continent is dreaming. We have felt it and been afraid, and turned to trivial things, and retired to the outer rim as if ready to depart. Everyday the quiet tides of darkness roll over us from the menacing interior.[3]

Australia is still in the shadow of the image it has always had. Lost in antipodal space, we have hardly diverged from that perspective in which antiquity first beheld our hemisphere, its "other", millenia ago. Only its shadow lengthens as evening falls across the land. It is as though we are endlessly absorbed by it, into it. Whence that wasted prospect in our eyes. Our deserts, desolation, desertion. That country constantly reflecting on its own revolving.

For too long antipodality has been centred in a "void extent". The power of this image is legendary, threatening to draw everything (men, artifacts, ambitions) into its orbit of annihilation. From the very first moment of "discovery", no water or inland seas, no visible contents, no typography even to break the silent stretch of nothing. Just a fiery vacuum, smokes on the horizon. Whoever challenged it was enthralled by the delirium of disappearance: its, as well as their own. Even today, as you drift across its monotonous terrain, words fail, hope fades and visions flee into the distance.

The advent of civilisation altered little in a space it had hoped to fill. In fact, the problem of space continues to dominate our whole history. The desolation of the centre, fringe existence, the circumference of an "interior" whose geography is at once external and internal. Even our so-called "cultural vacuum", which is as much a reality as the deserts in which it finds a natural image.

But it is only a simulacrum of the void. A whole multitude of peoples, races, things exist forgotten and unseen. Australians —or at least those of the peripheral or superficial point of view —alone seem blind to all this abundance. For us: an internal image of wasteland. For the rest of the globe: a plenum, the waste or refuse of space. A novel re-adjustment of sights, because today our territory is undergoing a great scrutiny and interference. All that room left to the few miserable savages who are unable to reclaim

it for themselves, or to the barons with their castles in the air and their mines in the ground, conceals another scene. For our destiny now lies in the foresight of the main powers towards the geographical, technological and strategic value of our land while we still tarry in that myopic oversight they have long since abandoned. Is it only rhetoric to say we die of the space we do not want to possess? Not so long as we continue to envisage as living in a limbo whose utilisation by others simply relieves us of an unpleasant duty.

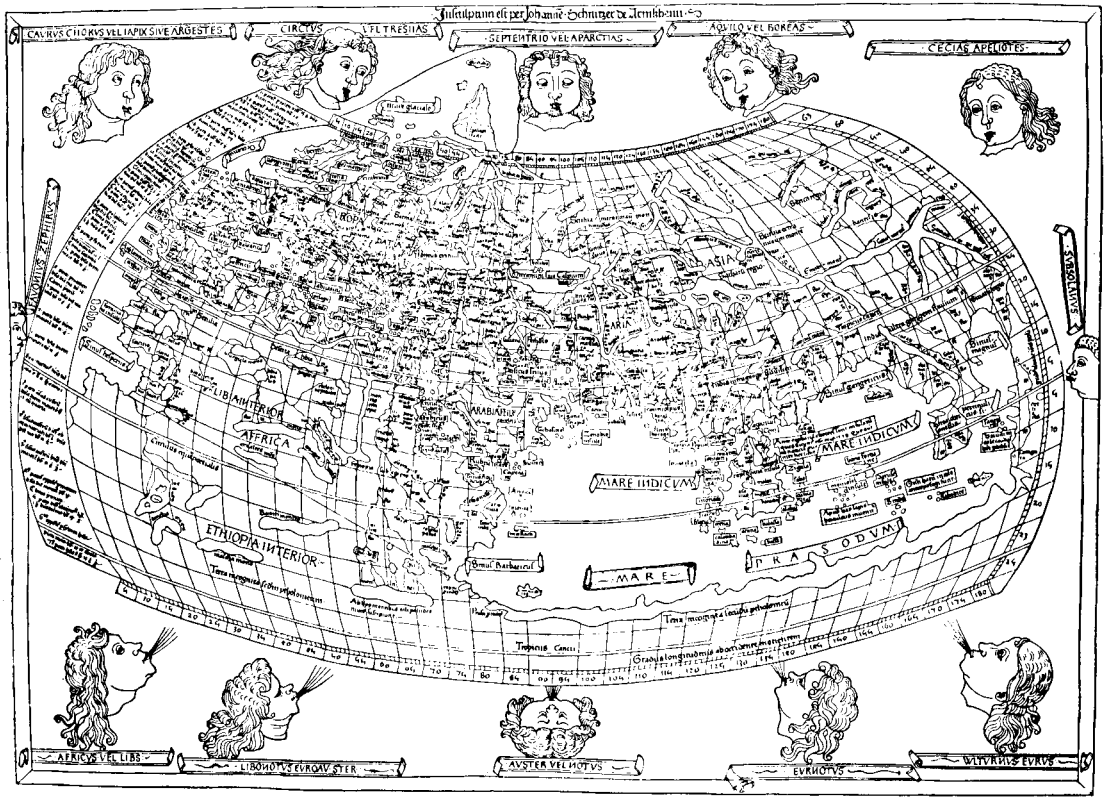
What a spectacular turnabout, then, subsists in all those maps, models and fanciful imagoes by which the ancient world could imagine a region contrary to the known cosmographical order, the Antipodes, where everything was an appearance and freed from the constraints of reference, but on whose register the gap between reality and imagination would increasingly disappear over the ages in an endless play of topicalities. Today it is the antipodal image which survives to turn the tables on the circumstances which inspired it.

Maps and Images

Maps always accompany movements. Whenever maps are made there have been flows of goods, people, machines, messages...War campaigns follow along the lines laid down by maps. So do voyages of discovery, of trade, of colonisation, of scientific enquiry, etc. Even information only flows along routes made possible or designed by maps (telegraph lines, roads and postal networks, media waves, geodetic or intelligence satellites).

But this is not at all to say that any movement must precede its map. That the image follows sight. When Alexander marches to Pattela, his very course, and what he saw along the way, was directed by the myopia of Hellenic geography with respect to the imagined size of Asia; for instance, despite actual observation to the contrary, he saw the Caspian Sea as a gulf in accordance with the beliefs of the time, as a north-east passage to the Orient. Nothing had changed with the Elizabethans who, much later on, still sought this passage in vain on Alexander's authority, or at least Pliny's. In this case, as in so many others, it is sight which follows the image. In fact, it is possible that flows always follow maps, and never the reverse.

Nowhere is the precession of images more evident than in the history of maritime exploration. So long as the mappa mundi of Ptolemy remained the true world image, that is to say a land-

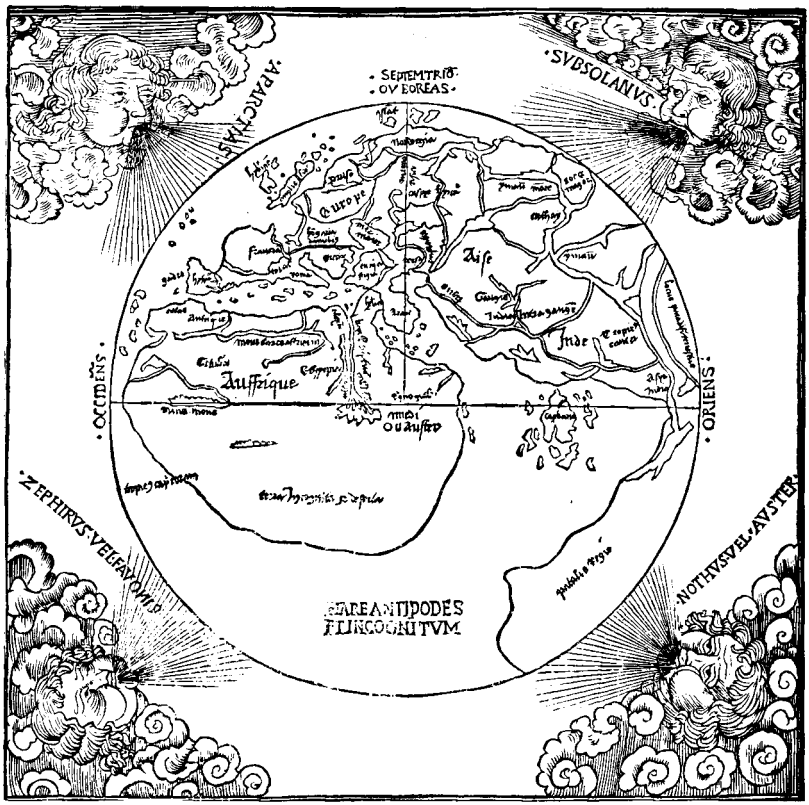


"The land-locked world" — from Ptolemy's "Geographia" (Ulm 1482). Courtesy Mitchell Library.

locked one, sailors would not dare sail down the coast of Africa. Here the unknown was literally the unseen; hence unimaginable, unnavigable, blocked off. The sea routes to the Indies had no image. There was only the land route, and all trade had to flow that way. The Portugese flows of Diaz and Vasco de Gama were stirred on by a different image, the one produced in the imagination of Henry. But his was not an image conjured up out of nothing, or inspired, as is said, by a scientific spirit. Aptly named the "Navigator", he encouraged the application of the compass and the astrolabe to the service of marine cartography, in a nomadism like a periplus. Hence his navigators were able to "liquidate" Ptolemy's obstacle by mapping their way down along the Madeiras, the Azores, the Canaries and finally to the Cape itself. This had the result of replacing one image by another, which in turn set in motion the great desire for Oriental trade.[4]

How do maps generate movements, and not the reverse? This might immediately appear to be only a problem which springs from false information. After all, it could be argued that nobody could travel to the east coast of Australia while they did not know where it was, the flow of the First Colonists proceeding from Cook's original traversal along it with its consequent mapping. But to reason like this only evades the core of the problem. For we might as well ask why in fact did Cook go precisely in the direction he did or what effect did earlier maps, however "incorrect", of the Great South Land have upon his journey westward from Tahiti. As with all attempts to fix, reduce the pay of referentials, you enter into the maze of infinite regress. The map of Cook folds back on those of William Jansz and Torres, they in turn on that of Magellan and other circumnavigators, eventually to blurr in the distance of Marco Polo's narrative "map" or Plato's mythic vision. Or is it a matter of accident? The event defining itself out of the tangled fabric of history?

But looking back into the haze from the portals of prehistory, the vision remains stubbornly clear: an imagining of geographical "otherness", silent conjectures or movements of the mind which experiment with the extent of reality, groping always outwards, a proliferation of images in the order of perceptual spaces. Beyond the horizons of all cartographies, beyond even the image of the "true" nature and constitution of the earth itself, there still remains the activity of image-making for the purposes of experimenting with the real. Map-making is image-making. It is a pure performance, and in that sense, it is always creative of itself. Which is why maps are projections in space of strategies or manoeuvres to come. The map of Cook, therefore, does not represent so much the discovery of a territory



Map of the world from "La Salade nouvellement imprimee", Paris 1522.
Courtesy Mitchell Library.

called New South Wales, but rather projects the grid within which all sorts of territorial movements had already begun to circulate- and which, precisely because of the map, could now accelerate on a grander scale: in itself it was a microcosm of England's scientific, military, imperialist, judicial, etc. ambitions in that part of the world, even perhaps a little imago of the then present state of affairs in the whole of Europe with respect to the expanding interests of its various powers and their conflicts amongst themselves.

The geography of maps is first and foremost that of strategy, not of the earth. And what they refer to or give bearing to is not territory as fixed substance, but territory as fluid field. Hence maps change as do their range of application (of Ptolemy, Mercator as well as modern geodetic projections are all equally real, they are all perspectives on real historical movements). Maps neither reflect absolute limits imposed by the earth, nor the serendipity of the eventual. They are equally determinate and imaginary. This may not be very different from the way in which Deleuze and Guattari pose the mechanism of the map when they say:

> [The map] is entirely oriented towards an experimentation which connects with the real...It leads to the connection of fields...The map is open, it is connectable in all its dimensions, detachable, reversable, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adaptable to any kind of setting, it can be set to work by an individual, a group, a social formation.[5]

It is probably worthwhile discussing two other aspects of the map.

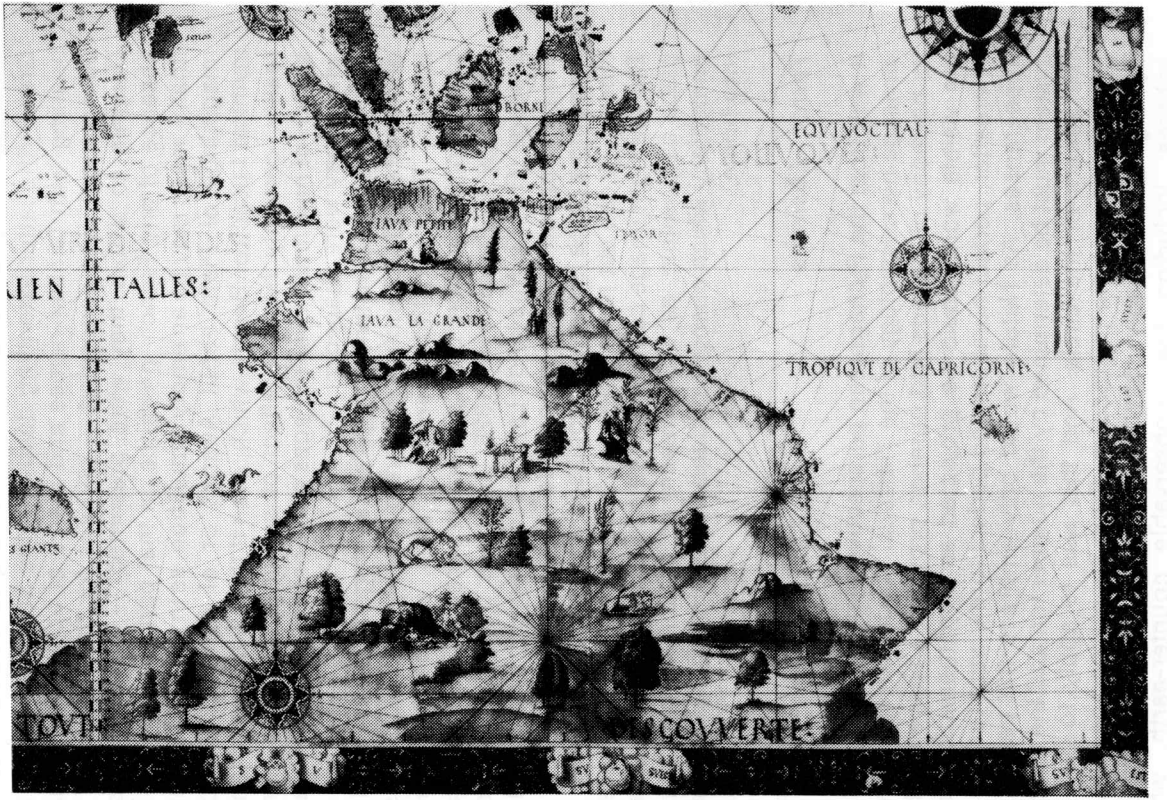
Firstly, it is true that maps concern representation. However, no ideal coextensivity ever exists between map and territory, nor can there be. It is in the difference between the two that the power of maps resides. But the nature of that difference can change (c.f. Baudrilliard's "successive phases of the image"[6]). Even when read as simple reflection maps are in danger of making new regions apparent: see the complaints of the English in the sixteenth century concerning the difficulty in obtaining charts of discovery from the East India Companies of Holland and Portugal. By the same token, maps may pervert the reality which underlies them, as with the case of the cartographical delusions of both the Spanish and the Portuguese about which side of the

meridian of Pope Alexander VI their respective acquisitions lay. This process of abstraction in maps can deepen so as to mask the absence of any/real geographical knowledge; seen, at work for instance, in the maps of Jean Rotz and Desceliers, behind whose juxtaposition of a "Java the Little" and a fantasmic "Java the Great" (the latter extending deep into the Southern Ocean and bristling with familiar names and marks of apparent first-hand observation), was concealed — perhaps for the comfort of the Dauphin to whom they were presented — the embarassing absence of any French presence in that part of the world. Or, finally, maps may be an empty simulation, as in the most beautiful imaginings of Plato about Atlantis or of Marco Polo about mythical Lucach or Beach; which, even if they were not meant as reality, certainly had the effect of sending countless men in search of new lands over the ages and contributed to the way in which they were shaped.

In the second instance, maps are strategems for the abolition of distance. In this function maps rejoin with the true role of visual images. They constitute vanishing lines, escape machines, a beacon of fascination. Look at Gerritsz's map of Dutch contracts with New Holland up to 1628: all those tracings of national prestige (G.F. de Wits landt, Land van d'Eendracht, d'Edels landt, etc.) remapped on the other side of the globe. Naming and mapping a place is a way to mobilise the pull between "here" and "there". It can set flows going, or freeze them when necessary. But the right image can reduce the effect of distance to locate a place as possible, as within reach, as proximate, by a play of immediacy which changes outland into environment, the hostile into home.

Terror Lostralis

It was from the Pythagorean perspective that Plato was able to envisage his cosmology of the *Timaeus*. The Ionian school, with its harmony of cosmos and number, provided a space in which the visible world could be projected as a mathematical map. Thereafter, perfect numbers and perfect forms were to dominate appearances. As Nature would only embrace the perfect, its system must be determined by the number ten and the figure of the sphere or the circle. And this was to apply to both the macrocosm and the microcosm. From such a perspective, the Pythagorians (variably) "saw" ten heavenly bodies of revolving spheres; including the unobservable counter-earth, whose terrestrial analogue was the opposite earth. Likewise, the orb was divided into five circles or zones: artic, summer, equatorial,



Portion of a map dedicated to Henry II of France (circa 1542) showing Java petite *and* Java la grande. *Courtesy Mitchell Library.*

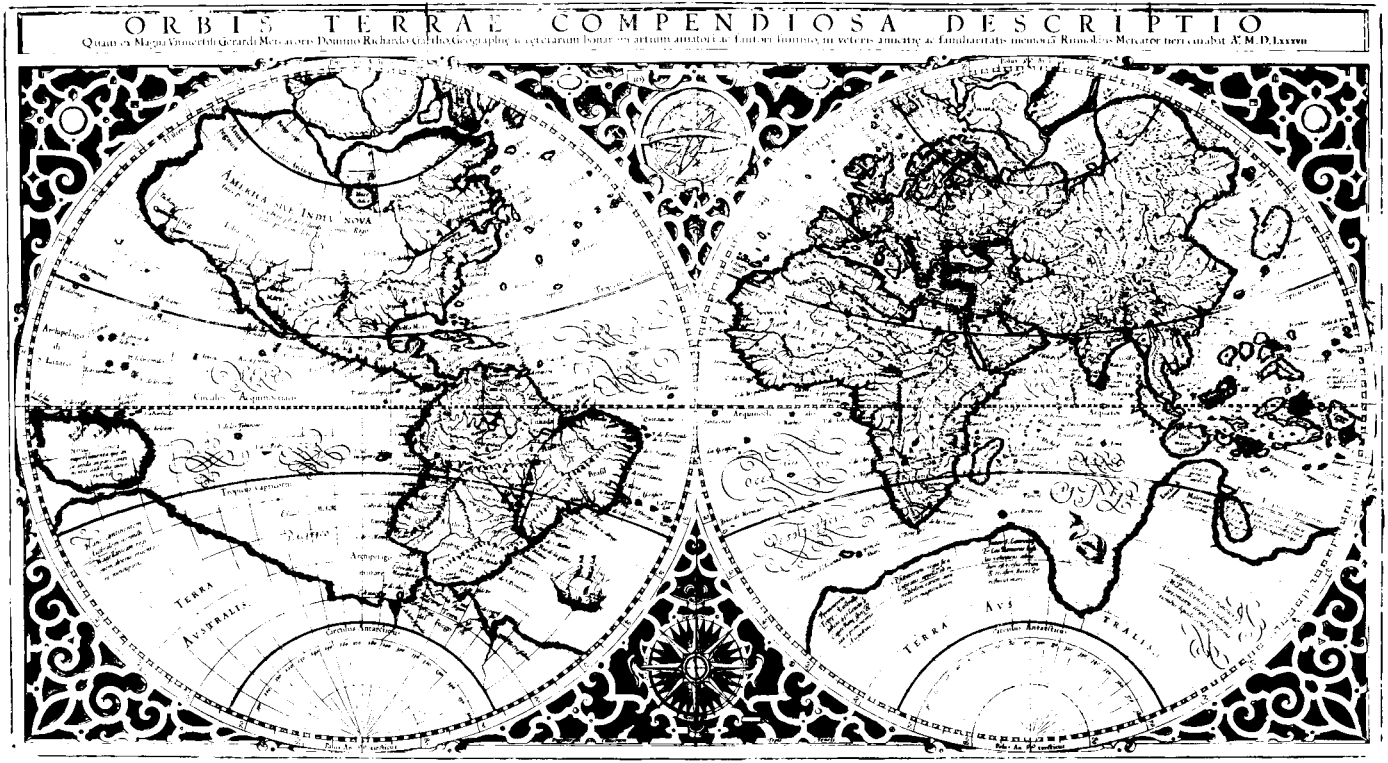
winter and antarctic. At once geometrical and geographical, the earth-figure was subject to a calculation which was able to centre everything by means of binary oppositions and inversions. All subsequent cosmography would take its direction from this abstract technique.

When Plato comes to invent his Atlantis myth, and the unknown continent beyond, he does so in the light of such a perspective. Even his vision of a land-locked globe is only a displacement by inversion of neptunean and smaller ones by Hecataeus and Herodotus:

> There was an island opposite the strait which you call...the Pillars of Heracles, an island larger than Libya and Asia combined; from it travellers could in those days reach the other islands, and from the whole opposite continent which surrounds what can truly be called the ocean. For the sea within the strait we were talking about is like a lake with a narrow entrance; the outer ocean is the real ocean and the land which entirely surrounds it is properly termed continent.[7]

In effect, as a sphere in which everything is relatable to a centre, a land mass at one point must be balanced by its equal at another; otherwise it would not be perfect, and challenge the divinity behind its plan. Hence both the fact, and the relativity, of the Antipodes:

> For it is quite wrong to suppose that the universe is divided by nature into two opposite regions, one "below", to which sink all bodies with weight, and one "above", to which no body rises of its own accord. For since the universe is spherical all points at extreme distance from the centre are equidistant from it, and so all equally "extremes"; while the centre, being equidistant from the extremes, is equally "opposite" to them all...if anyone moved round its circumference he would repeatedly be standing at his own antipodes and so refer to the same point as both above and below...("Above" and "below") must thus be purely relative because the main aggregates of the basic kinds of matter occupy opposite regions to each other; and what is light or heavy or below or above in one region will be found to be or to become the direct

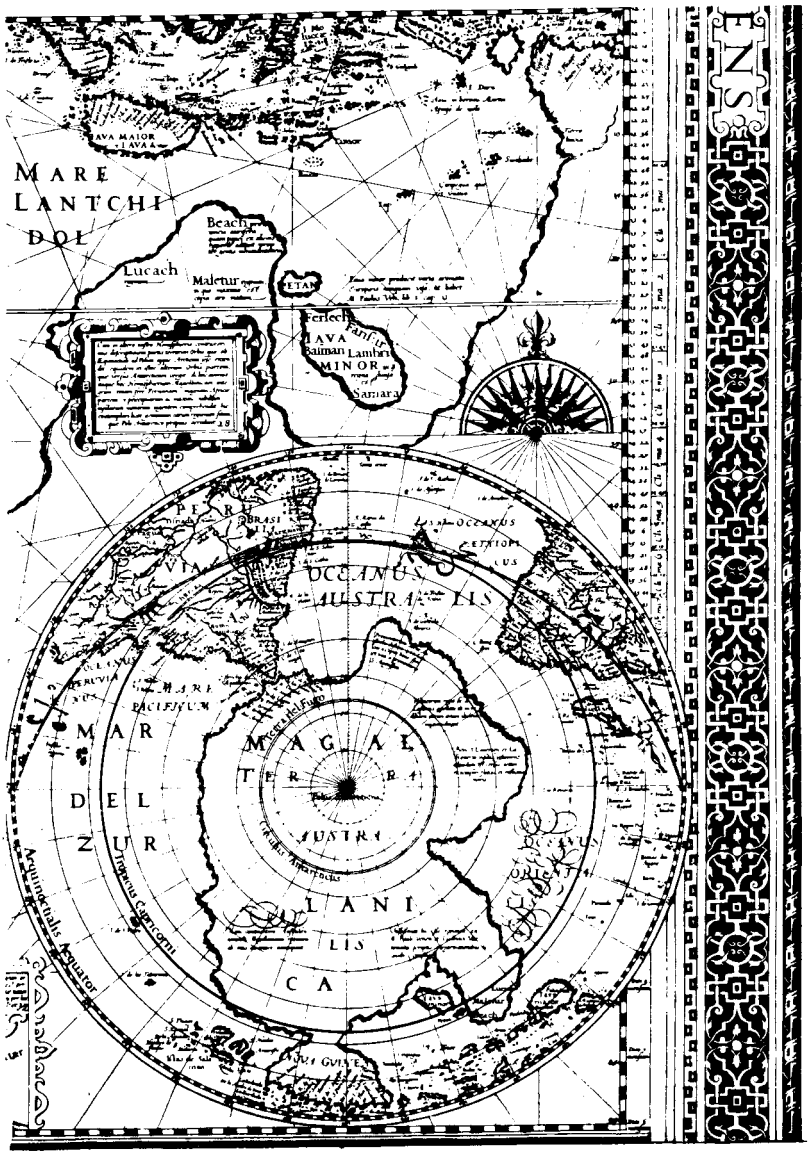


Mercator's "Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio" *(1587). Courtesy Mitchell Library.*

opposite of what has these characteristics in another region or to be angularly inclined to it at different degrees.[8]

On entering the typology of an *orbis terrarum*, the Antipodes is never entirely forgotten. It continues to play the role of an *alter orbis* ("another world") and to reflect *a contrario* and point by point the figure and zones of the land mass, as then conceived, of the northern hemisphere (cf. the chart of Pomponius Mela and the Orb of Crates). There were attempts, like those of Thomas Aquinas and the sixth century monk Cosmas Indicopleustes, to flatten the hellenic orbis by bringing geography down to the plane of scripture. But in the main the power of the antipodean image remained unassailed throughout the period stretching from the sixth century B.C. up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it began to stabilise as a locatable geographical identity. Not that this latter process had to await actual sighting or discovery. After Ptolemy in the second century A.D., for example, the art of geography begins to be based on precise principles of astronomical referents, by using these to establish a proper network of parallels and meridians in order to project a sphere onto a plane, a stumbling block for earlier geographers. His version of the *terra incognita*, though still approaching a pure simulacrum, nonetheless appears "real" by its juxtaposition of identifiable geographical entities: in the case linking it up with the African continent on one side and China on the other. This approach set the trajectory for most future exploration and navigation, as well as for their failure. It can be seen in the Contarini world map, (1506) incorporating changes in scale and in location after the discoveries of Columbus, or in those which issued from the great circumnavigations of Magellan and others, like Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570). In the latter, his *Terra Australis Nondum Cognita* extends from Tierra del Fuego in an easterly direction towards the Indies to accommodate Marco Polo's legend on the one hand and westerly towards New Guinea following the Pacific journeys of Magellan and Mendana, completely encompassing the whole southern hemisphere as one vast land mass. Likewise with the *Orbis Terrarum Typus* of Petro Plancio (1594). So long as the image of a Great South Land pervaded the perspective of the explorers, it found its substance, its being in any sighting below about Lat. 35°.

All those flows which everincreasingly creep southwards in search of Magellanica or Beach or the Islands of Solomon were, it is true, partially motivated by legends of gold or of a great white civilisation with which trade could hopefully be iniated. This is most particularly true of the Spanish, like Mendana, De Quiros and Torres. But it is also present in the map of Mercator of 1569,



Section of Petrus Plancius' Mappemonde of 1604 showing Magallanica with Lucach, Maletur, and Beach —provincia aurifera— *province of gold. Courtesy Mitchell Library.*

where in approximately the area of Arnhem Land stands the legend: *Beach provincia aurifera etc.* Then there is the proximity of the terra incognita to the Malaccas, the centre of the spice trade to which all the maritime nations at one time or another were irresistably drawn.

Before the discoveries made by the Dutch and the English in the seventeenth century, however, the overriding functions of all these antipodal maps was that they simulated what lay outside the cosmology of the known. And perhaps in a way not too dissimilar to the function of utopias as analysed by Marin in his *Utopiques: Jeux d'Espaces*: not surprisingly many did originate in seafaring yarns and bogus travelogues.[9] The happy divergence of legend and fact (and the impossibility of there ever being anything else at the time) may have worked to neutralise a contradiction in reality with which Europe had always struggled from the beginning of its civilisation. If it can be posed as a tentative conclusion: that is, their anxiety-fantasy about expansion.

These, then, are some of the ways in which the ancient world came to discover the other hemisphere: the hemisphere of its "other". Far from truly anticipating lands as yet undiscovered by means of prescient images or of reminiscences from actual prehistoric "discoveries", the global cartography of Europe —and the taste of distant places which fired it — always functioned to stabilise the boundaries of the then-known world. The images and techniques which it deployed (extension, displacement, inversion, encirclement, etc.) reflected, assimilated the unknown in terms of the known, thence establishing the co-ordinates within which the former could be revealed without de-naturalising the reality of the latter.

Right from the beginning (and do we not endlessly return to this theme?) the antipodal image was nothing but an image necessary for European expansion. It was a simulacrum concealing what it was not. The non-place of the Antipodes, with all its abundance of space and contrarity, only represents a structural reversal of everything which seemed to limit the European ideal: room to grow in, untold wealth, the "opposite earth" whose image dissolves the appearance of a nothing too close to home. In the great leap forth of the European powers, nascent for a time but

rapidly to increase thereafter, it is only the counterpart of the threat of territorial restriction.

This is the theatre in which the history of Australia begins to unfold. *Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum*, it is the *nondum* on which everything actually pivots. As "not yet", as both void and plenum, it exists like a frozen tableau where, depending on how close you get to look at it, it either means the death of appearance or the appearance of death.

The Limbo of Castaways

In a remarkable book, Geoffrey Blainey explains how distance has shaped Australia's history.[10] This thesis on the surface might appear to be self-evident. Yet, apart from one particular insight it leads him to, the basic thesis is itself false. For it was not the "tyranny" of distance which obstructed Australia's discovery, or its "taming" which subsequently opened up the continent to European development. On the contrary— and which twists the argument on itself— it is in the void of distance or difference that Australia was created and is still maintained. Precisely, the charm and the destiny of the antipodal image lies in its neutrality. In its power to neutralise.

If Australia today has all the appearance of emptiness and otherness and "downunderness", then these are only ideal perspectives or vanishing points as originally viewed from the northern hemisphere. Nonetheless, they appear to us to be refractive, opaque, here and now. And we in turn reflect them back across the void from whence they have come. In their way they have become the thread of a "history" mistakenly called ours; that is, so many focal points for a native imagination which, like a camera obscura reveals distant images in the darkness of its interior. Hence that whole cultural tradition of ours which is obsessed with an untranslatable difference, that art informed as native by its very obscurity or vacuity. This place we inhabit belongs to the order of waste or (literally) "deserts": it is the limbo of castaways. We rejoice in being the "lucky country" because we believe distance has preserved us— but, from what? To enjoy the pleasure of having more space than anyone else, to give ourselves up entirely to space, so that in turn we are possessed or evacuated by it? To become so many last explorers on the edge of a desert from which beforehand we know we shall never return or which we have never left?

But again, whose image is this? Certainly, not ours. It is only an old illusion which haunts us, but which nonetheless is quite real. A trick of perspective or the fading of sight. We grow old of a history which purports to have begun again, or to have diverged from the past, but which still endlessly projects itself into our future. David Ireland expresses this illusion of a future beautifully when he has one of his characters in *A Woman of the Future* announce:

> Australia does as the world does, it sits on the confortable coast of life, where its settled nature is steeped in the past. The future is the greatest problem. The future is at the centre of Australia's problems.[11]

Voss, too, will turn away from the coast to face his future —and that of the country — in a desolate interior. As with the bones of the missing explorer themselves, we have neither discovered that centre nor that future. It has remained to others to step in to take the latter from us.

The imagery of the void resounds like a mantra throughout the pages of all of Australia's discoverers. From William Jansz of the *Duyfken* (1606) to Cook of the *Endeavour* (1770), and beyond, the antipodal simulacrum is draped over the country like a shroud. It is still here, haunting the present with its echoes:

> (We) found, that there was much land for the most part waste, and various places inhabited by wild, cruel, dark barbarous men, who killed some of our sailors, so that the true location of the land and what might be produced or desired could not be understood...
> William Jansz & Jan van Roossengin, *Duyfken* (1606)

> ...they found nothing but waste lands, and wholly barbarous, cruel, savage people, who surprised and killed nine of our men...
> Jan Carstensz & Willem Joosten, *Pera & Arnhem* (1623)

It is bad rocky land, without trees...the coast showing very uniform, without any foreland, or inlets, as other lands have, but seems a dry cursed soil without leaf or grass...it seemed not to have rained there for a long time, and there was no sign of running water, and moreover the high land was very bad, and the land was dry, without trees, leaves or grass...

Francois Pelsaert, *Batavia* (1629)

We saw in many places inland great smoke clouds, but perceived no fruit-trees, houses, canoes or people; it seemed to be waste land.
Pieter Pieterszoon, *Klein Amsterdam & Wesel* (1636)

Thus they secured nothing advantageous, but only poor naked beach-runners, without riches, or any noteworthy fruits, very poor and at many places bad natured men...

Abel Tasman, *Limmen, Bracq* (1644)

The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world.

William Dampier, (1688)

...generally speaking, with respect to the South Land,...nothing has been discovered but a barren, bare, desolate region; at least along the coast, and so far as they have penetrated into the interior. Willem de Vlamingh, (1696)

...the land is in general low and level with very few Hills or Mountains....(It) naturly produces hardly any thing fit for man to eat and the Natives know nothing of Cultivation...we never saw one Inch of Cultivated land in the whole country...However this Eastern side is not that barren and Miserable Country that Dampier and others have described the western side to be. We are to consider that we see this Country in the pure state of Nature, the Industry of Man has had nothing to do with any part of it...In this Extensive Country it can never be

> doubted but what most sorts of Grain, Fruits, Roots etc of every kind would flourish here where they once brought hither, planted and cultivated by the hand of Industry...
>
> James Cook, *Endeavour* (1770)

In a way, discovery marks the end of Antipodes as perspective or illusion of space, and the beginning of its transition into the era of geo-strategy or strategies of real space (although it will never entirely lose that ethereal dreamy quality of the never-never, so characteristic of that phase in history in which this part of the world acted as doppelgänger, the neutralising abyss in which Europe would wrestle with the spectres of its unknowns). 1770 is the turning point when Antipodes itself begins to be neutralised. *Space becomes the vista of an "all out" absorption.* First in the north and the west, then in the east, and finally along the southern coast, image hardens into reality: it is drawn on the map, no longer entirely as an imaginary figure or size, but more and more in place names, in the muddle of tongues, in toponymic lacunae, in accompanying fragments and reports, in travelogues, even on the bodies of the dark and elusive aboriginals. Ultimately, in the great desolate silent nothingness lying just beyond range of sight. At heart still a simulacrum, but bound by a tactical surface of accelerating flows, by the circumference of denial. This is a strategy which has profoundly dominated the course of recent events in Australia. Henceforth, everything will flow in to fill the vacuum: goods, people, skills, ideas, military and national presences, etc. Even its own inhabitants, never ever properly naturalised, find themselves having to leave first in order to return as valuable. And any value they have at all involves and dissipates in concentric circles towards the interior: more and more we retire "to the outer rim as if ready to depart".[12]

A Suitable Piece of Real Estate

Blainey begins to detail the strategic significance of this course. From 1606 to 1788 the geographical position of Australia was no longer any mystery, certainly for most of the eighteenth century. And yet not once did any European power seek to colonise the area; only castaways, buccaneers, whalers and sealers found there way there. All that space only existed as a balance to the

Asian land mass. Suddenly the continent assumed strategic importance. Why? Blainey gives two main answers to this question. His first answer is that Cook's discovery of flax and tall pines on Norfolk Island (valuable for sail and mast) offered a solution to the French Blockade of Russian ports, where most of these supplies came from. Secondly, because of the prevailing westerlies, it actually took a shorter time to go to the Spice Islands via the south of Australia than to go via the Indian Ocean. The first answer is probably of little importance. Anyway, Norfolk Island flax turned out to be almost useless for sail making. The second answer, however, is probably another matter. Once Cook mapped the east coast of Australia, the validity of the southern route became an established fact; as is well known, the English only barely managed to grab their territories ahead of the French and the Russians. It doesn't really matter whether England placed more importance on Australia as a penal colony or not (the evidence seems to show that she did not); it was nonetheless a very convenient alibi for that country's presence in such a distant part of the world. Apart from guaranteeing security for trade with the East, the Australian colonies could act as grainery and general supplier for Eastern commerce. Then, of course, there were obvious military benefits to be gained from such a presence.

The main evidence for Blainey's thesis is the pattern of habitation on the Australian coast. Almost all the inhabitants on today still live in what is known as the "Boomerang Crescent", precisely where ports of call where once needed to equip and refresh ships on their way to the Indies. The centre of that need shifted somewhat away from Sydney after the discovery of Bass Strait by Mathew Flinders in 1798, a site to which Melbourne owes its sole existence.

From this comes the pattern of existence in Australia. Concentration in the south-eastern corner, a constant reminder of the role this land played in European expansion in Asia and South-East Asia; and all the rest, empty or dotted about here and there. But the pattern now begins to change. The true strategic value of Australian territory today no longer lies in its proximity to these trade routes but in its geographical significance for orbital deterrence. If it never was before, the centre is truly, in the words of Desmond Ball, "a suitable piece of real estate"[13]. A revitalisation of the dead heart? Perhaps not, when you reconsider the centre, and all the intelligence and tracking installations concealed therein, as supporting each other in the deterrence of a whole population: that global link-up of all territories and of all spaces pivoting in the desert. North-west Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar, Omega: with these geo-strategy

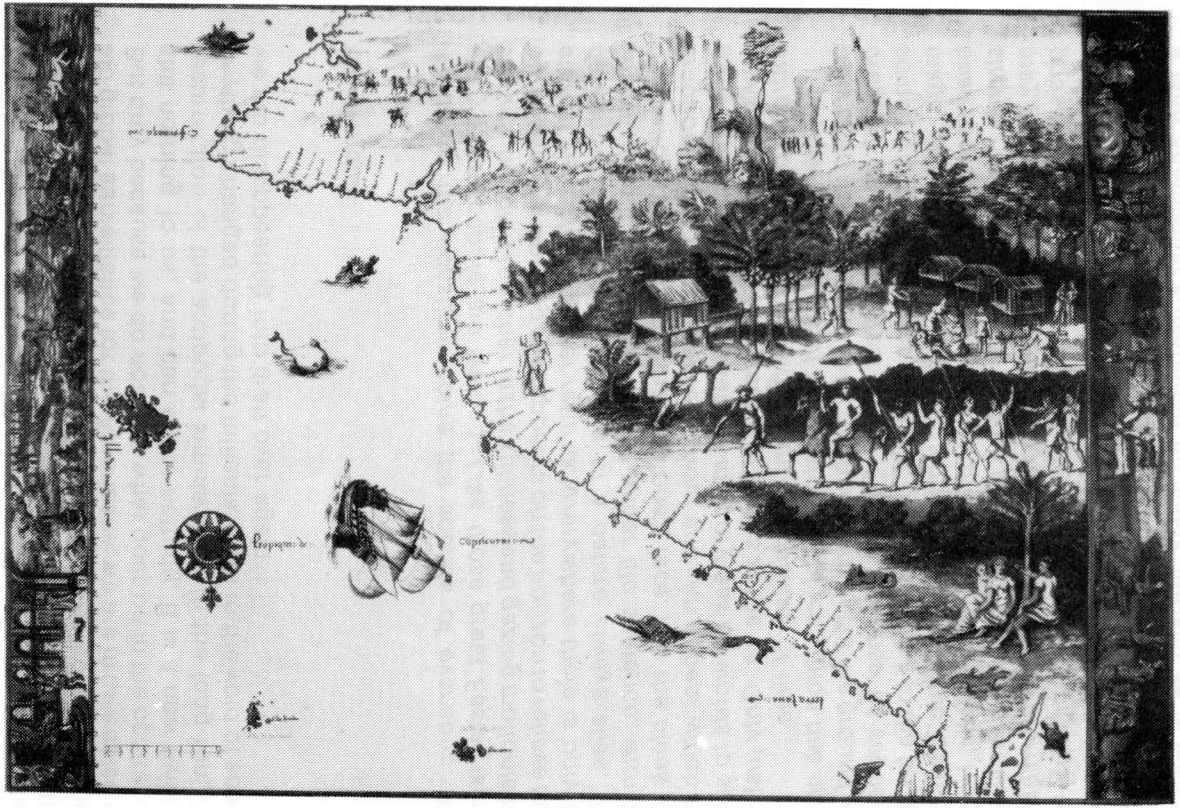
reaches its zenith, and the antipodal image its revenge at the same moment. It is no longer we who act as balance or sponge for the artefacts of a European civilisation. Everything is sucked into the void to be re-emited back through the stratosphere to help map the territories of the rest of the globe. Like messages skirting in over the horizon. But it doesn't stop there. As we unknowingly aid global surveillance for the Americans, we are in turn spied on. But only because we do not care what goes on in the centre; it is still nothing to us, and can effect nothing. It is a new twist or resurrection of the antipodal simulacrum. In the long run, has anything changed during the millenia: born in the void of space, we are disappearing into it all over again.

Ozymandias

All along the coastline come the sounds of evensong. And everywhere people are waiting. Like those great Easter Island statues, huddled together in the stillness and gazing motionlessly out to sea. Yet nothing ever appears on the horizon to relieve their eternal vigil. Nothing ever returns, everywhere there is only the darkening silence. The silence of a nature always alien, that which is endured as one would under life sentence, with the desolation of it carved deep into one's face. It is the bleak and emotionless look of an exile without end. An appeal which has gone unheeded so long that the memory has no words to say it any more. One simply senses it, it hangs in the air. Only just the murmur of lifeless things to count the passing of time.

This is a land without any history. A place which has never truly been inhabited. Its heart has been torn out of the ground and dragged to its furtherest edge. For the purpose of seducing something back, perhaps mythical, perhaps actual, in the form of magic incantations, sculpted signals or megalithic beacons beaming a message far out into the void. Distress calls, frozen sirens. For the return of a culture long since departed (or which may never have been there in the first place). For the return of the gods.

But the unremitting ocean continues to ebb and flow against its shores, occasionally to throw up more driftwood or to wash away loose pieces of the land. But its shores are a barrier. For it is a land completely surrounded by water, literally an is-land, an isolate. Even with that island called "continent"; the terror of isolation merely grows in proportion to the size of its inner space. Big or little, islands die from the inwards out. That is their logic,



Nicholas Vallard's "the first map of Australia" (1547) showing its imagined inhabitants. Courtesy Mitchell Library.

the common destiny; they only differ in the time it takes. Islands only survive by facing their interior. *Until they have either consumed themselves or leaped across great distances to feed on others. Or else sometimes this process does not even start, being petrified in the moment of its birth. Hence the defining property of the insular: the triangular relationship between isolation, interiority and implosion. The oceans are scattered with examples of this process. Though the worst, the minimal term is the one of Easter Islands. Whatever happened there is permanently frozen into a mute ritual of desertion. It is a fractured island, with a massive ravaging of its interior for the sake of great idols erected in the name and in the shape of other deities, then smashed and left to crumble and topple into the sands. That is all that remains of it: a few splintered fragments, holes here and there, indecipherable glyphs, and those huge empty eyes staring blankly out to sea.*

**Part 2 Meridians of Apathy* to appear in Brou-ha-ha (1981)

Footnotes

[1] cf. Jean Baudrillard, "La précession des simulacres", *Traverses 10* (Fev. 1978), pp3-37. "Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, a substance. It is the generation by the models of the real without origin or reality: a hyper-real. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. It is henceforth the map that precedes the territory –PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA– it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable (of Borges), today it is the territory whose tatters are slowly shrivelling on the map. It is the real, and not the map, which has few remains subsisting here and there, in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself.*" (translation: Paul Foss)

[2] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", *Complete Works*, Collins London (1970), p988.

[3] David Ireland, *A Woman of the Future*, Penguin (1980) p310.

[4] It might also be the case that non-ptolemaic charts or portolans had already fallen into his hands. But that does not matter. The point is that maps like all images precede insight.

[5] G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *Rhizome*. (From an english translation to appear in I&C no. 8.)

[6] Op. cit. Baudrillard,"Such are the successive phases of the image:
—it is the reflection of an underlying reality

—it masks and perverts an underlying reality
—it masks the *absence* of an underlying reality
—it has no relation to any reality at all: it is its own pure simulacrum".

[7] Plato, *Timaeus*, 25.

[8] ibid., 62-4

[9] See Frederic Jamieson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalisation and the Production of Utopian Discourse", *Diacritics* (June 1977), p2-21.

[10] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, Sun Books, Melbourne, (1974).

[11] Op. cit. Ireland, p187.

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J.O. Thomson, *History of Ancient Geography*, Cambridge (1948)
G.A. Wood, *The Discovery of Australia*, Macmilan, (1969)

From Deserts Structuralists Came:

A Reading of John Lechte's
Politics and the Writing of Australian History

Peter Botsman

The paper and discussion that I want to initiate today focuses on recent developments and appropriations of new sets of theories in universities and fields of knowledge in Australia. These new theories, which I somewhat hesitatingly call "semiotics" and/or "structuralism" appear in French, English, Anthropology, Fine Arts and History departments with various effects. This paper will consider one example of the function of structuralism in the field of Australian history. The central text that I will consider is John Lechte's *Politics and the Writing of Australian History*[1]. However, what follows is less a review than a series of observations on the impact of a body of theory identified with figures such as Foucault, Althusser, Lacan etc. in an institutional context.

Lechte's *Politics and the Writing of Australian History* was published in 1979 as a Melbourne Politics Monograph. Its 'aims' can be briefly summarised as follows: firstly, it appears to be concerned to introduce the work of such diverse figures as Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, Saussure and Althusser into Australian historical studies. This is by no means an easy task, but Lechte yokes the work of these figures into what he calls *"The Structuralist Approach"*. Under this rubric, Lechte seeks to combat what he sees as a great lack of theoretical and historiographical analysis of Australian historical writing. Lechte challenges notions of time and progress as uni-linear 'unfoldings', and criticises the naive assumption that historical writing can be or claim to be a transparent reflection of 'the past'. Using 'the structuralist approach', Lechte then explodes the inadequacies of certain 'empiricist' historical texts such as A.G.L. Shaw's *Convicts and Colonies*, R.M. Crawford's *An Australian Perspective*, and A.G. Serle's *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861*. The third and final major aim of Lechte's monograph appears to be to reveal that far from being 'innocent' and 'objective', the writing of Australian history has

from the beginning been inherently political.

Despite the appearance of radical innovation in Lechte's text, in the end, his conclusions are far from subversive. They in fact, make many concessions to the dominant traditions of Australian historical writing. The best example of this is Lechte's eulogy to Manning Clark's *A History of Australia*.[2] After 'casting off the dead wood of Australian historical writing' ie. empiricism, Lechte sees *A History of Australia* as the first historical work produced as 'a theatre of representation'. He claims it to be a non-authoritarian and politically conscious historical work. Lechte merely enters into the mundane battles of 'empiricism' versus 'interpretive' historical writing which have dominated historical debate in journals such as *Quadrant* and *Historical Studies* for decades. The form of this debate is hardly conducive to innovative ideas or suggestions. Rather, to enter into it means to be confined to certain boundaries and to certain conceptions of what history and theory about history are for. It is in this sense that "structuralism" makes an interesting entrance into Australian historical debate.

If the Lechte text is an indication, "structuralism" undergoes a new construction in the "antipodes". "Structuralism" gives a new meaning to both the figures and the work it seeks to represent. For with Lechte, "structuralism" finally reinforces rather than challenges existing structures of historical knowledge and representation. Theorists like Foucault, Althusser, Lacan etc. as "structuralists", are given unquestioned cultural status and theoretical importance. To this extent, with Lechte we are still from "the deserts waiting for the prophets to come".

With these points in mind, it is useful to consider *Politics and the Writing of Australian History* as a peculiar cultural object. It is peculiar because it is sandwiched between both traditional notions of Australia, described in historical writing, literature and cultural commentary as the "desert continent" and the "desert" outlined by Foucault as that which underlies notions of "Man", "History" and "Representation". The advent of Lechte's "structuralism" owes more to the image of a "great drought" in the areas of Australian history, literature and culture in general than it does to what Foucault outlines as the "deserts" of history, literature and culture themselves.

Firstly, however, let us consider the notions and various forms we have given to Australia as the desert continent in Australian history, literature and politics. "The desert' is of course an

appropriate term to describe the inland landscape of Australia. However, beginning with Henry Lawson's much quoted characterisation of Australian society as *"a mongrel desert...the worst dried up god-forsaken country I was ever in"*[3], the desert has been used to describe much more than just the land. The desert metaphor has often been used as a focus through which our culture, our intellectual life and our politics can be understood. In history, we have Serle's *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1851—1861*[4], which gives an account of the first "blossomings" of an Australian creative and intellectual milieu. As the very title of the book signifies, the possibilities and achievements of creative life in Australia are seen to be built on the great inland deserts of our country, but also on those of our minds and culture. Ironically it seems that exactly these notions and pre-occupations lead Lechte to identify a barrenness, a great *"lack"* in the area of Australian historical writing. In this, Lechte parallels Manning Clark— the historian he claims as the contemporary hope for historical writing in the "desert continent"! For Manning Clark, writing Australian history was a means to combat the aridity of life, art and intellectual endeavour in "the desert continent". Clark's philosophy of history, and his conception of its significance for Australian society is reflected in an address he gave to a packed Melbourne University auditorium upon the retirement of R.M. Crawford as Professor of History. Clark, amongst other things, had this to say about his teacher and predecessor:

> You sir, wanted us to view the world with wonder and delight. You made us believe that here in what Professor Hope has rather savagely described as 'the Arabian desert of the human mind', we might turn the flintstone into a springing well. And it is beginning to happen. The historian was more prescient than the poet. We are beginning to grow up. For you were inspired by a lofty and high-minded vision of the role of the historian: you saw the historian as one of the Muses, and, as such, called to illuminate the human situation through the comic, the epic and the tragic. You saw the historian still responding to the sacred charge delivered to the Muses at Olympus: "Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless Gods who are forever, those that were born of Earth and starry heaven and gloomy night and them that briny sea did rear. Tell how at first Gods and Earth

came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above...." Sir I believe that you have imposed a pattern on the river of our intellectual life which will live long after...[5]

Clark was not wrong to assert that a pattern had been established on Australian intellectual life, for the myth of the great escape from "the deserts" has not only been confined to history. More recently, sociologists and political economists have longed for the definitive analysis of Australian politics and society. In *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Society*, S.J. Butlin has written that any newcomer to Australia recognises that there is a great lack of socialist approaches to Australian history, despite its "obvious" applicability. Echoing this, Bob Connell's article "Images of Australia" argues that Australian society has been described through a handful of over-worked cliches, and, finally, Humphrey McQueen has written that if we are to ever escape sterile, empirical understandings of Australian society, we must develop a Marxist overview[6].

It was perhaps in response to all this, and the dominant image of "a desert-like culture", that motivated Lechte to comment on the dryness and arid objectivity of Australian historical writing. Concurrent with the image of the desert, there have always been *the prophets from the deserts*— and the subsequent hope of fulfillment through the promises of an indigenous history, literature or more recently Marxist political economy. In Lechte's text we appear to be offered the hope of yet another philosophy or form of analysis which will make up for our great lack of theory, our demise in the area of history and our inability to develop any decent political analysis.

In the opening pages of his monograph, Lechte states: "The lack of any extant language for speaking about Australian history is the primary concern of this book"[7]. This is followed by a certain lament for the sorry neglect of historiography in Australia: "There was a time", Lechte writes, "when historiography was on the agenda"[8]. This was R.M. Crawford's seminar at Melbourne University in the 1950s. Since then, Lechte argues, there has been a dearth of historiographical theory. As proof of this, Lechte goes on to say that "there is simply no comparison in Australia between the bulk of articles to be found in an American journal such as *History and Theory*—from the standpoint of explaining how an historian writes history and the kind of theoretical framework that comes into play when he does"[9].

By pointing to this lack of Australian historical theory, Lechte sets up the situation for the appearance of "structuralism". His

notion of the great *lag* or *lack,* however, is quite an arbitrary interpretation. It could be maintained that the situation here is not dissimilar from the situation overseas. What is true is that when we have had historiography, it has always been subservient to the practice of writing history. R.M. Crawford wrote in 1950 that historians had to undergo "an apprenticeship" to get "the feel of their craft", which he likened to the art of cheesemaking: "The traditional master craftsman cannot give his apprentices...the rules he knows in words. He comes to recognise a certain sort of feel in his cheese. The apprentice has by long practice to learn the feel of his material for himself"[10]. For historians too, it was a matter of getting, "the feel of the cheese", of having the right balance of sources and facts.

Crawford's philosophy of history may be simple, even crude, but it is not dissimilar to historiographical patterns elsewhere, and indeed has much in common with the Leavis tradition of literary criticism and interpretation. Also, "the raw brand of humanism" which E.P. Thompson has made his trademark is linked with Crawford's position. The common ground between figures like Thompson, Crawford and Leavis is that in order to maintain their respective positions, each must consider that historical and literary writing and construction can either transparently reflect or capture the essence of an era, a human being, life or whatever. Language and practices of representation do not come into it, it is all a matter of balance and interpretation[11].

However, the point here is that this sort of conservatism is not unique to Australia. It is not some intrinsic "lack" peculiar to the Australian context. For example, Gaston Bachelard in France wrote of philosophers and historians of science as pragmatic dogmatists. He chided them for maintaining the thesis they held at thirty until they were sixty. "Nothing seemed more grotesque to Bachelard than those philosophers, those professors of philosophy who spend their lives constantly maintaining a position...This permanence he saw as immobility; far from being a token of firmness in principles he saw it as the sign of nullity of thought...."[12]. This is clearly not dissimilar from the situation, even now, in many history departments in Australia which seem capable of riding out Force 10 "theoretical earthquakes" without so much as an acknowledgement. I think it is fair to say that historiography in Australia has functioned as a "Hydra" which has cemented history to definite and pragmatic institutional bounds, rather than as a spectrum of explanation or exploration. The catch-cry: "Students of history should be writing history, not writing about historical writing" rings resonant in the corridors of

our academies of higher learning. However, it is not that there has been any lack of theory, rather, for historians there has been no need for theory or strategies of historical writing. "History is always there to be discovered, recorded, written etc.". It has never, until now, been a matter of constructing history. For our historians it seems History has always constructed itself. This situation has led to certain uniformities and presumptions, as Stuart MacIntyre has observed: "While conservative Australian historians wrote exploration and settlement history, radicals wrote the history of the labour movement. Neither history is exclusive of the other and both possess the same academic and cultural features"[13]. The rules of the endless historical search, in this context, remain constant.

Certainly we have had, as Lechte maintains, our share of philosophical immobilism— but it is not that dissimilar, or that remote from other situations overseas. This is important because it is in the context of the alleged "great *Australian* theoretical inadequacy" that Lechte promotes his idea of "structuralism". "Structuralism" arrives from an unproblematic "other realm" (i.e. overseas), as an oasis in the desert of Australian historical theory — but perhaps it is really only a mirage. "Structuralism" is given as the philosophy/theory/system which can finally situate the historian and historical text in the "grammar"/"unconscious"/-"imaginary" of the politico-cultural situation. It can tell us what history is really about, show us the inner dynamics of the writing of history, even enlighten us about the politics of historical writing.

Against the notion of the "desert" of historical theory we also get another description; Lechte gives us his version of a "history of structuralism". Beginning with Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Lechte traces a progression through random and diverse areas: linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, history, and comes up with a "manifesto" or model of consolidated theoretical positions. Thus Lechte writes: "a structural analysis focuses on a system, be that system a text, a discursive formation, or the social relationships in a society"[14]. A structural analysis detects the laws and parameters of such systems, specifying the way a text, discourse or the relations of society actually function.

It is easy to see why a theory which claims to do all this would be an attractive contender in the area of historical, political and cultural studies. Lechte's "structuralism" places a new metaphysical weight on the unconscious laws which are thought to govern language, history and society. It proceeds at the level of "langue", alternatively "grammar" alternatively "the unconscious", alternatively "myth". Lechte claims that by

understanding and deciphering these levels we can know the "deep structure" and underlying dynamics of discourse, language, society etc.[15].

It is in this sense that Lechte's "structuralism" occupies a similar position to the historiography espoused by Crawford and his colleagues in the fifties. It is no longer through a "cheese-maker's intuition" that the "Truth" about History and the writing of the historical text can be known, but rather by a linguistic/grammatical/structural reworking. It is significant to note here that Lechte's analysis is done from a new privileged position. For those able to occupy this position, the nature and meaning of a text or entity can be derived from constructing the unconscious system of laws by which it operates. A structural analysis can, according to Lechte, decipher the relation between a text, its theoretical milieu and its politico-cultural context. However, in making these claims for "structuralism", Lechte seems doomed to fall into a similar position to Crawford's historiography; a position of pragmatism where a certain "balance" of writing against "the world" is proclaimed. In this case, "structuralism" tends to meet the demand for a validating discourse which can approve forms of historical writing as either "true" or at least, "more truthful" than others.

But against the "desert" of historical theory which Lechte complains of, there is another metaphor of desert which is crucial here. This is precisely what Michel Foucault calls the "desert" of History, Philosophy and Man. Foucault writes: "...if philosophy is now experienced as a multiple desert is is not because it has lost its proper object or the freshness of its experience, but because it has suddenly been divested of that language which is natural to it"[16]. The "desert" referred to here by Foucault is the hitherto assumed realm of "other" meaning which has cemented our understanding of philosophic or historical language. The desert image is apposite now, for what is signalled in this passage, is that discursive knowledge can no longer be taken as representing some "other" truth or reality, but must be interpreted as having certain limits. It has no omnipotent claim to representation. In this sense, history and philosophy have been divested of their "natural language" because of the abandonment of universal and linear forms of calculation and knowledge.

In the preface to Bataille's *L'Experience Interiore*, Foucault writes: "What of us when, having become sobered, we learn who we are? Lost among idlers in the night, where we can only hate the

semblance of light coming from their small talk"[17]. It is in this marginal region, from these depths, "where language fails and where the subject who speaks vanishes, where the spectacle topples"[18], that philosophy and history are now seen to repeat endlessly their small talk. What a contrast to the demand in our institutions for the idea of a historian who inhabits language of the past like a secret and perfectly fluid god. Foucault offers the conception of words and speech in a void-like space, where the only possible revelations are the limits and "mad truths" of language.

The irony of Lechte's account of "structuralism" is evident here. The void which "structuralism" is supposed to be able to combat for Australian history is embraced by Foucault as a necessary correlate or starting point for any historical writing. Historians must, (if Foucault is to be heard out), see their object as necessarily limited, transient and everchanging. The "world" is not fixed and certain, rather it is always subject to construction. The gaps and uncertainties which are so visible in the area of Australian history must not be spackled with structuralism. On the contrary, the gaps and breaks are not only indications of the impossibility of "universalising" historical analysis, but also of the necessary transience and contradiction of historical analysis.

The image of the "void" or "desert" in which philosophy now finds itself is of course not only relevant to the history of ideas. Interestingly enough, it is from this premise that the hitherto assumed elasticity of Marxist concepts is also seen now as being necessarily limited. From Althusser's innovations to Baudrillard's and Hindess and Hirst's work, there is a growing impatience at the promises and assumed sovereignty of Marxist theory. Despite Althusser's claims for a Marxist science, he effectively strained the classical apparatus of Marxism to a point beyond which it can never recover. With the more recent of Hindess and Hirst's works, the "scientificity" of Marxist theory, including that of *Das Kapital* is finally disputed. The notion that Marx's concepts and political economy can represent or intervene with the "essential" structures of capitalism is firmly dispensed with. Hence, in direct contrast to Butlin's optimistic claims in *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, Hindess and Hirst suggest that interpreting the signs and structures of the economy is something of an incantation. They have argued that the great faith that Marxists have ascribed to political economy has led to a situation where, for sectarian Marxism, economic crises are "religious festivals": the promised moment of epiphany when the totality re-assures us that it and its tendencies are still with us[19].

Jean Baudrillard goes even further, by suggesting that rather

than destroying the abstract universality of bourgeois concepts, Marxism in turn creates a new and even more ferocious theoretical imperialism, which affects a repressive simulation of reality, revolutionary activity and society as a whole[20].

Although these figures are working in diverse areas, one thing seems to be central which is in contradistinction to Lechte's portrayal of "structuralism". This is the questioning of the omnipotence of forms of representation produced by historical, philosophical and political theory. This questioning leads to a challenge of the authority and hierarchical positions of particular theoretical, teaching and political practices. These challenges seem lost in the ambit of Lechte's text.

The central irony of Lechte's *Politics and the Writing of Australian History* is the counterpositioning of the images of "desert", on the one hand, the great drought in the area of Australian historiography, and on the other hand, the contemporary dissatisfaction and challenges made against the assumed sovereignty of historical, political and philosophical forms of theory and representation. Lechte seems to be dominated more by the desert notion as a metaphor of Australian intellectual contexts, than he does by the "desert" of representation itself. This effects the forms in which Foucault, Saussure, Althusser et. al. arrive on our shores.... They are imported to Australian academies as if from a container ship from Japan. They appear as compartmentalised components of the theory of structuralism, tailor-made to fit into all those eight week methodology courses which are now so notably outdated in arts faculties. Lechte's "structuralism" could perform a definite function, if allowed it could fill the looming absence in Australia of theories of history and society. However, to do this would involve reversing the political and theoretical roles of Foucault et. al.; and it would also involve a good deal of arbitrary characterisation and interpretation via the universalising model of "structuralism". To accept Lechte's "structuralist" model would be to revive enthusiasm and give validity to practices of history and philosophy which have been fundamentally questioned elsewhere. What I am suggesting here is that Lechte's "structuralism" in an Australian context seems to have been grasped as a series of solutions, rather than as a series of problems and radical interventions. To this extent, *Politics and the Writing of Australian History* is wedged firmly between claims of a lack of a theoretical tradition in Australia and the

proclamation of "structuralism" as a body of theory which can indicate what is wrong both theoretically and politically with traditional historical methodology and practices. However, perhaps the most outstanding problem with Lechte's excursion is that in the end we are at exactly the same position both theoretically and politically as when we started— structuralism or no structuralism.

Perhaps the best example of how Lechte's text appears to take us somewhere, and yet, in the end relies on already overworked assumptions and connections, is in his discussion of the politics of historical writing. Here Lechte, via a complicated series of manoeuvres reveals how the unconscious series of rules which undergird a historical study are ideologically determined and reflect the politics of a particular period or set of interests. Lechte's major object of political analysis is A.G.L. Shaw's *Convicts and Colonies*. *Convicts and Colonies* is structured around and empiricist framework and characterises Australian society as progressing from convict settlement to a flourishing democracy. Shaw's book is, in a word, conservative. However, Lechte goes through some fancy footwork before he reaches this "profound" conclusion.

Lechte's analysis of *Convicts and Colonies* is influenced by Lacan's innovations in psychoanalytic theory. His argument is that historical discourse must be viewed as "strategic rememoration": "It is this process of rememoration itself— the process identical with the writing of history— that imbues historical discourse with its possible political basis"[21]. In order to know the politics of historical writing, Lechte uses the Freudian concept of "deferred action": that is, the idea of the discursive/psychological displacement of a traumatic event. As the trained psychiatrist can locate the sign of a trauma in a patients discourse, Lechte proposes that a "structural analysis" can detect underlying traumas in the "strategic rememoration" of Australian history.

Introducing *Convicts and Colonies*, Lechte writes: "We would like to outline at least one instance in which the empiricist writing of Australian history has functioned to conceal a truth which it did not (does not) want to acknowledge— no doubt for political reasons".[22] Lechte argues that Shaw's account of Australian history in *Convicts and Colonies* hides a traumatic political reality which it does not want to acknowledge. The tell-tale sign of Shaw's (and presumably Australian history's) trauma is a

superficial reference made to Bentham's panopticon— a nineteenth century prison design which was devised to effect the incarceration of prisoners through the use of an elaborate surveillance system, rather than by overt physical means— in *Convicts and Colonies.* Shaw's reference to the panopticon is cloaked in euphemisms about the development of a more humanitarian society in Australia. But for Lechte, the mention of the panopticon is Shaw's "Freudian slip". At this point, Lechte uses Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as a counter discourse which discloses the traumatic reality which Shaw does not want to acknowledge. Lechte argues that the panopticon was not an advance by "humanity", but rather is a symbol of a vast system of repression indicative of the development of bourgeois society: "Simply to acknowledge the element of reform in the field of crime and punishment, and to unite it with a burgeoning humanitarianism is to ignore the fact that Australia also was a part of the total process whereby society was subject to a re-ordering effected under the auspices of the bourgeois state".[23]

But Lechte's idea of Shaw's "slip" is an extremely contentious one. A structural analysis is supposed to give us access to the unconscious political aspect of historical writing. But it can be argued that the outcomes of Lechte's arguments are known in advance. The counter-posing of Foucault's discourse as that which reveals the politics and limits of Shaw's text has less to do with an unconscious system of political order than with a confrontation between two conflicting analyses. (The confrontation which Lechte initiates is a welcome one. However that is beside the point here.) Similarly, Lechte's connection of Shaw's analysis with a conservative milieu is a reversion to a self-fulfilling sociologistic series of arguments, however appropriate they may seem.

Lechte can, it seems, hardly be wrong about Shaw and *Convicts and Colonies.* The temptation, after reading Lechte's analysis is to say "Yes, it is dead right". But there is more to it than that. It is important to disagree with a number of Lechte's claims. One effect of Lechte's arguments is that Shaw's text is seen as a "traumatised or strategic rememoration" which is somehow "sanctioned from above" by a conservative milieu or force. Yet, at the same time, the trauma is itself unconsciously acknowledged in the text. Lechte claims structural analysis to have access to this "unconscious acknowledgement"; however the crucial point is that it is not the "unconscious" which is disclosed. How can it be? To give way on this would be to ensure a magnification of the same kind of patriarchal relationship between psychiatrist and patient— where a psychiatrist is seen to be able to disclose the

underlying truth and dominating forces in his patient's life through an analysis of discourse. But the psychiatrist's analysis is not a disclosure. It can be more clearly seen as the dominance of one set of discourses and explanations over another. This is also the end result of Lechte's arguments. One series of discourses is privileged over another.

There should be no concessions made here, because to accept, on the one hand, the reconstruction of Shaw and empiricism, and on the other, the prophetic theory which can fill in and cultivate the void/the deserts/and the traumas which are supposed to haunt our collective unconscious is in the end, to accept a new set of patriarchal analytic relations. This prompts a number of questions: under what pretext can Shaw's *Convicts and Colonies* be detected as obeying certain unconscious, grammatical or "imaginary" rules? Who are the breed of cultural, political and historical analysts that can carry out such a method of detection? How is the training in the use of this method to be instituted? Is Shaw's reference to the panopticon a *slip*? On what grounds can a structural analysis be taken to disclose *traumatic realities* and further, what are the effects of positing a connection between the "unconscious" and an alleged deep collective structure of political allegiances?

Lechte makes a great deal of the fact that the author is dead - thus there can no longer be practices of psychologising or sociologising a particular text or theory as indicative of author "X" in social environment "Y". But consider its alternative as exemplified in Lechte's analysis. *Convicts and Colonies* is seen to obey certain grammatical, "imaginary" and ideological rules which are indicative of empiricism, which is indicative of ideology "A", which is indicative of cultural milieu "B", in society "C". The tautological mode of argument which has plagued phenomenology, sociology and empiricism is not escaped in Lechte's arguments. Lechte censors the more radical thesis that the "truth" or "unconscious" of a text can only be known themselves by obeying certain analytic rules and practices. If this thesis had been employed in *Politics and the Writing of Australian History*, its claims would have been seen to be themselves necessarily limited.

These judgements should not be seen to over-rule the importance of Lechte's book in the context of Australian history. It is to his credit that he challenges the dominant empiricist assumption that historical writing is devoid of politics and that it can be a transparent reflection of the real. But I want to make a

couple of last comments before we move to general discussion.

Lechte's monograph is probably most important because it throws into sharp relief a number of problems which must be overcome if the advances of particularly Foucault, Althusser and Lacan are to be effectual. The first and most obvious point is that there can be no use for the conceptualisation of the wide variety of figures and theories named in Lechte's text as belonging to the "unity" called "structuralism". This glib conception of a consolidated theoretical system fits far too easily with the forward drives of traditional institutions of historical writing in search of new forms of philosophical validation. Lechte's text, whilst delivering the self-proclaimed "death blows" to empiricists such as Shaw, ends up proclaiming Manning Clark's *A History of Australia* as the embodiment of some sort of epistemological "break" with his "time" and "truth" obsessed predecessors. Clark's texts are seen as "theatres of representation", and this, Lechte argues, is the path along which future Australian historians must tread. This is a case in point of how the exotic theory of "structuralism" could, if it were allowed to go unchallenged, refurbish an historical tradition based on rampant empiricism with one based on rampant humanism. Lechte is absolutely wide of the mark when he comes to discuss Manning Clark. What we get is an uncritical validation of how the endeavour to capture "the spirit of place" through a montage of personalities, scenarios and caricatures is somehow more powerful and privileged than a history which places a high priority on naming in what order passengers disembarked from the First Fleet. To hold to this is to invite a new imperialism, and to suffer under new prophecies and representations to which all power is attributed.

The second major problem of Lechte's *Politics and the Writing of Australian History* is its conceptualisation of politics and the forms and determinants of historical writing. Lechte does nothing to change the classic conception of politics as outside and yet determinant of theory and knowledge. It is probably the case that Shaw is guilty in many respects of everything Lechte accuses him of with regard to the description of a free, democratic and humanitarian Australian society. However, any conception that simply assumes that empiricism is somehow constructed and determined on behalf of capital, or on the behalf of conservative politics is merely an easy and self-fulfilling manoeuvre. Any survey of leftist historical analysis will reveal that empiricist analysis is not the exclusive possession of conservative politics. Moreover in Lechte's analysis, the counterposition of freedom, democracy and humanity with political oppression and

repression excludes by the imposition of universal categories, any question of considering institutional schemas of power in their specificity.

The relationship between politics and historical writing, between political theory and exported theoretical schemas must be explored not merely asserted. For contrary to the impression Lechte gives, the theory of Foucault et. al. will not, if it is given a wide rein, fit easily into course structures in our universities. Lechte goes part of the way towards re-writing the relationship between politics and history when he suggests that politics and the drama of history is centered in its writing, in the specific conditions of its production. It is the conditions of production of history that must be explored. However, to consider the construction of empiricism as ideologically determined and in the service of societal misrecognition on behalf of conservative politics obscures, under the rubric of a totalising causality, the specific institutional conditions of production of history. The conditions of production of Shaw's text cannot be conceived as determined at the level of the unconscious, which is in turn determined ideologically on behalf of ruling class interests. Neither can Foucault's or Manning Clark's texts be taken to have finally located either the "trauma" or the "truth" of the past.

Lechte's reading, which produces both empiricism and Shaw in the ways I have outlined are themselves the result of definite institutional practices which must be changed. There is no point or utility in developing conspiracy theories, or in substituting the hegemony of one set of knowledges with another. As Deleuze says: "There are no just ideas, there are just ideas". But it seems we must learn this slogan in another way, at least for the time being: *there is no desert and there is no oasis or prophets or prophetic theory*. There can only be countless ways of constructing the past, reconstructing it and there are only allegations that we are collectively bound to images, politics and practices.

Footnotes

[1] John Lechte, *Politics and the Writing of Australian History, An Introduction to a Structural Study*, A Melbourne Politics Monograph (1979?)

[2] ibid. p186. Also see Chapter 5, "The Historical Text as a Theatre of Writing".

[3] Henry Lawson quoted in *Historical Studies* bound vols (1967-9) p330.

[4] A.G. Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1851-61*, Heinemann, Melbourne.

[5] Manning Clark, "Reminiscences of Crawford", *Historical Studies* no. 2. (1962).

[6] McQueen and Connell cited in David Walker's *Dream and Disillusion: A Search for Australian Cultural Identity*, A.N.U. Press (1976) p206.

[7] Op. cit. Lechte, p4.

[8] ibid. p2.

[9] ibid. p2.

[10] R.M. Crawford, "The School of Prudence or Inaccuracy and Incoherence in Describing Chaos?", *Historical Studies*, no. 2 (1962) p12.

[11] For more on this conflict compare E.P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*, Merlin Press (1980) and Paul Hirst's "The Necessity of Theory", *Economyand Society*, Vol. 8 No. 4 (Nov 1979) pp417-45.

[12] Dominique Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology - Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault*, N.L.B. (1975) p87. Also on this see Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock Publications (1977) p13.

[13] Stuart MacIntyre, "Radical History Bourgeois Hegemony" *Intervention*, no. 2, (October 1972) p72.

[14] Op. cit. Lechte p5.

[15] Lechte writes:"We will try and show how the specific internal mechanisms of a text which are made extant by structural analysis, relate not only to a specific theoretical milieu but also to a political and to a lesser extent social milieu. The goal set then, is to specify the relationship between the language (langue) of Australian history and politics"Op. cit. Lechte p24

[16] Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* D.F. Bouchard (ed) Cornell Uni. Press, (1977) p41.

[17] ibid. p41.

[18] ibid. p41.

[19] See the concluding chapters of A. Cutler, A. Hussain, B. Hindess, and P. Hirst's *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*, vol 1 R.K.P. pp313-29; vol 2 R.K.P. pp233-94.

[20] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* Telos Press, St. Louis (I975).

[21] Op. cit. Lechte p173.

[22] ibid pl75.

[23] ibid p180.

On Matters Foreign

Terry Blake

My approach in this paper will be philosophic in the *bad* sense of this term. That is to say, I will stick closely to several texts, of which two are not even books but recorded interviews, which are virtually inaccessible due to their distribution, their language, their content, or all three. The paper will be about certain ideas that I have been worrying over for six or seven years now, without ever getting within cheering distance of a concrete application. Further, I will proceed by way of academic comparisons where even a crude ear will detect that I actually takes sides, even preach.

The object of my study will be *Pluralism* as it is expressed in the texts of Feyerabend, Lyotard, Serres, Deleuze and Guattari; and I wish to consider a relation of misreading between the French texts on the one hand, and Feyerabend's text on the other. This is not to defend some sort of symmetry in the status of two cultural traditions in interaction, but to comment on a striking asymmetry.

My moral will be the rather reassuring one that the power of certain French texts is enhanced by a strategy of misreading. I argue that there are certain implicit cultural operators that determine the scope of a particular assertion and that the scope assigned to a French text by its own context is far too narrow, owing to the rather narrow perspectives of French intellectual history. Thus we have the amusing spectacle of people first importing as paradigms such bodies of thought as Lacanian psychoanalysis or Althusserian Marxism or Kristevan semiotics and then introducing the word of Foucault, Irigaray, or Deleuze to rescue us from an orthodoxy that is already only a second-hand academic artifact that never quite caught on, anyhow.

Feyerabend

In *Against Method*, Feyerabend presents a thorough-going

pluralist account of knowledge: "knowledge so conceived... is an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible (perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives, each single theory, each fairy tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others in to greater articulation— all of them contributing via this process of competition to the development of our consciousness. Nothing is ever settled, no view can ever be omitted from a comprehensive account".

As developed by Feyerabend this position has three major strands: 1. *Anarchism*. Against the fixed principles of rationalist method, Feyerabend argues for a research in which all methods are available for use and in which it is possible arbitrarily to suspend a method where context seems to dictate it: "successful participation in a process [like science]' is possible only for a ruthless opportunist who is not tied to any particular philosophy and who adopts whatever procedure seems to fit the occasion". (AMp18) This epistemological anarchism is to be distinguished from naive anarchism in that is is not a simple inversion: the opposition to all rules as such but an expansion: all rules, ideas, methods, traditions are permitted.

2. *Scepticism*: traditional rationalist epistemologies propound a criterion of knowledge, a principal of demarcation between genuine and spurious knowledge. Feyerabend, in the sceptical tradition, argues against such traditional criteria as induction, verification, falsification, consistency, increased empirical content etc. In so far as these criteria are defining of the rationalist concept of knowledge, this involves a rejection of the existence of such knowledge. The force of this strand is *ad hominem* in that the demolition of any rationalist criterion is not a rejection of knowledge as such, but only of the ultimately monist conception held by rationalism.

3. *Relativism*. Feyerabend defends relativism as a political principle: the equal rights of all traditions or forms of life and as an epistemological reality: there is no non-arbitrary criterion for the cognitive ranking of different knowledge traditions.

In the english-speaking philosophical world Feyerabend has met with almost unanimous rejection, and it is interesting to explore the reasons for this rejection in relation to the question of reading.

The first major criticism is one that responds to the negative aspects of Feyerabend's position. He is read as a simple sceptic (of the sort that claims "knowledge is impossible") or a naive anarchist (of the sort that claims "away with all rules"). Now this criticism operates in a philosophical context where there is a

strong familiarity with the epistemic scepticism discussed in the British Tradition (e.g. that knowledge of the past, the external world, other minds is impossible). Thus the scepticism of Feyerabend which is more akin to the scepticism of Pyrrho, a scepticism of counter-arguments against various dogmatist positions, is reduced to a definite thesis: that knowledge is impossible. The second misreading is a political one. Feyerabend is labelled a naive anarchist (and this move is usually made by Marxists) and is claimed not to be able to exclude Fascism, if anything goes, Hitler goes. The principle of reading is the same in both cases: first, the position is weakened (from Pyrrhonian scepticism as process to Academic scepticism as doctrine, from epistemological anarchism that aims at preserving and increasing the actual plurality of forms of life to a simple-minded oppositional anarchism). Once this weakened position is fabricated, it is then charged with being *too weak*: too weak to account for our knowledge, too weak to exclude Fascism.

It is the readings that centre on the third or relativist strand of Feyerabend's position that are most interesting as they are based on a correct understanding of what is being asserted i.e. relativism, and a felt need to respond to it. This response to Feyerabend is unique to english-speaking discussions of his work. (The French philosophers treated here do not even consider the possibility of such a total relativism that would place science on the same plane as astrology, witchcraft, Hopi Indian metaphysics, Aristotelianism etc.). The reason for this I can only guess at, but I think it is partially due to a strong presence of Wittgenstein's ideas in our intellectual climate— such ideas are often developed in a relativist direction.

There is a fourth strand to Feyerabend's pluralism that has not even been noticed by his English or French speaking commentators. That is his strategy of cosmological criticism and its association with a general methodology. I mention it here but I can only deal with it towards the end of my paper when I discuss the pluralism of Deleuze and Guattari, who do not mention Feyerabend but who seem to me to elaborate a non-metaphysical or pluralist cosmology based on a flexi-ontology that is closely related to Feyerabend's general methodology.

Serres

I now turn to Michel Serres, who seems to actually practice the flexibility of method advocated by Feyerabend. His latest book *Le*

Parasite is a complexly argued work which uses thermodynamics, information theory, the mathematics of fuzzy sets, but also the Bible, the *Odyssey*, the plays of Molière, the fables of *La Fontaine* and the multiple meanings of the word *"parasite"* in French.

His method is one that he describes as *randonné* which he derives from an old French word meaning the disordered path one traces in a chase. He thus refers to his method as "at random". It does not respect the standard separation between academic disciplines and is anarchist in the sense that it opposes all commandment and hierarchy in the direction of intellectual research. He thus advocates a pluralism which is closely related to the anarchist strand of *Against Method*:

"From the moment a dominator holds a space and its paths and the energies or powers that are unleashed, he holds a strategy. Strategy is a method, but it is an art of war. Method was a path on a map. Strategy is always the regulated displacement of powers in a space. The discourse of method is a science of war.... To break away forever from all strategy. The non-thanatocratic solution is to fragment spaces, deconcentrate energies. The only possible i.e. vital philosophy consists in repudiating the universal. Pluralism and polymorphism!"

(La Distribution 289)

Serres' response to *Against Method* is to acknowledge the similarities but to maintain that it has nothing to teach him:

"I think that the general thesis of Feyerabend is correct. It is one that I myself have developed before.... But it is demonstrated in a way that is for us French already obsolete.... It is a very important book because it is correct what he says. But the quarrel of rationalist with anarchist method is something that belongs to the nineteenth century.... It goes back to Diderot."

For Serres, rationalist method is the use of clear and distinct ideas and procedures to study simple and determinate objects. He therefore demands a more complex, anarchistic method to deal with more complex, disordered objects:
"If method is at random, it accepts fluctuations, that the object is never perfectly constituted. One always works on distributions, studies objects that are disordered, clouds, crowds.".

This leads to an approach to science that does not make a sharp demarcation between science and non-science:

"I think that there is not as clean a separation as one thinks between science and 'culture'... I believe that reason is in science, it speaks about the real world, and speaks reasonably about it— and there is also plenty of unreason. But I also think that in culture, ideology, religion, the human sciences, there is plenty of un-reason and also plenty of reason".

This leads to a moderate scepticism in regard to knowledge — not in the sense of doubt, but as an attitude of looking, of being attentive to the object of study rather than applying a pre-established grid.

But it is in considering Serres' version of the relativist strand of pluralism that we see the moderateness of his position.

But first a digression on reality. One of the most unacceptable ideas, for an english speaking philosophical audience, but readily accepted by such philosophers as Serres and Lyotard is the implication in Feyerabend that reality itself is multiple, that a pluralist knowledge uses many different accounts of reality without assuming that there is a single object of convergence (i.e. Reality with a big "R"). For Serres:

"My body...is not plunged on one unique and specified variety of space. It works in Euclidean space, but it only works there. It sees in a projective space, it touches, caresses and manipulates in one typological variety, it suffers in another and understands and communicates in a third."

(La Distribution, p201)

Thus the reality that a culture has access to is constructed out of a specific way it connects and disconnects its spaces — we inhabit a multiplicity of realities, of incommensurable spaces in disordered, fluctuating connections. But this swarming multiplicity of diverse spaces is repressed by the smooth unified space of transport and displacement without obstacles, by a universal rational space.

Hence the task of pluralism is to discover a world of disorder in which the rational is but a rare island in a chaotic ocean of disturbances and turbulences. Method becomes a wandering path that undoes the smooth connections of unified space and makes other, less familiar connections.

Pluralism figures as a richness, having at one's disposition many spaces, many pathways: "True culture, intelligence, richness is pluralism. Where there is only one truth there is totalitarianism, repetition, death".

Serres condemns scientism: the belief that only science has reason:

"I have studied the history of religion and there are rational structures, very strong, very powerful ones. There is a rationality almost as strong as in science and which needs to be analysed in a different manner to that of science."

But it is at this point, where the discussion touches on the relativist strand of pluralism that he parts company with Feyerabend. For Serres believes in the objectivity of science: "Objectivity is the state of science at a given time. It is the state of physics today".

It is with this nuanced defence of the objectivity of science as local, specific in time, and relative that a rift in the idea of pluralism opens up. The bulk of Serres' methodological pronouncements (and I wish to argue that this is not unique to him) are ambiguous between two positions. One is the extreme pluralism of Feyerabend in which science is just one tradition among many, with no epistemological privilege. The other is a more moderate position which finds knowledge in non-scientific traditions (like gold in deserts), but assumes as "obvious" the objective superiority of science. A similar ambiguity holds for Feyerabend (and in fact he held the more "moderate" position earlier in his Popperian period).

Thus the possibility of misreading rests on an ambiguity in the scope of various methodological assertions. The same assertion with a restricted scope entails what I call moderate pluralism and with a more extended scope entails extreme pluralism. An auditory illusion results: To Serres, for instance, Feyerabend sounds familiar and his relativism is contained and pacified; to an ear practiced in Feyerabend, Serres sounds familiar and his privileging of science sounds paradoxical.

If we are to account for this difference in scope, I can only take up a suggestion made by Serres himself. That is, continental and anglo-american philosophy progress along different temporalities. In particular, he remarks that empiricists like Hume, which are old hat to us, are news to the French. As if to fulfill his own oracle, he went on later to praise Popper for having understood the element of risk and adventure in knowledge.

This immediately suggests a striking absence, till now, in the pluralist push of French thought— of Wittgenstein. I now turn to a philosopher who explicitly seeks an encounter with Wittgenstein's thought in order to divest himself of certain metaphysical constraints imposed by his intellectual history.

Lyotard

Lyotard in his two most recent books *Au Juste* and *La Condition*

Postmoderne wishes to explore the changing status of knowledge in industrially advanced societies. For him pluralism is not just a philosophic position within academic discourse but a condition that knowledge is increasingly approaching. This change in the status of knowledge is accompanied by what he calls the death of the grand stories of legitimation, the death of metaphysics understood as a general doctrine of the legitimation of the true and the just. According to him, such grand stories of legitimation are facing a crisis of credibility.

Post-modern then, refers to the state of culture after the transformations which have affected the rules of the game of science, literature and the arts starting from the nineteenth century. More specifically, it refers to the transformations in knowledge associated with the incredulity in the meta-stories that have legitimated the rules of the game of science.

Lyotard's explicit starting point is Adorno's declaration at the end of *Negative Dialectics* of the death of speculative reason and its discourse of emancipation and his demand to accompany metaphysics in its fall by "multiplying the micrologies".

In responding to this demand, Lyotard borrows from Wittgenstein a method of analysis by language-games, as a method appropriate to his object: the changing status of knowledge.

Paganism, for Lyotard, is the affirmation of the multiplicity of language-games that make up a society and a practice of experimentation in which new moves are made for the pleasure of sustaining or increasing the plurality of the whole. The moves are made without criteria dictated by some grand meta-discourse but at the micrological level of speech acts.

Once again, it is this anarchic strand of pluralism, the pagan experimenting without criteria that is taken to be the point of convergence with Feyerabend: "I feel in sympathy with Feyerabend. In what he calls 'anarchism', I think I recognise micrology".

For Lyotard, pagans are artists who have available several games and move from one to the other making new moves and inventing new games. The obstacle to such unregulated experimentation is when people "believe in the signified and think that they are in the true. That is where paganism stops and doctrine is reintroduced. Thus one must have, in relation to what one invents in the games of language, an attitude that I will not call sceptical, as the word is too damaged, but let us say libertine or libertarian".
(Au Juste p 120-1)

The relativist strand of this pluralism is developed in *Au Juste* which is a sustained response to the charge that pluralism must lead to Fascism. Lyotard goes through an elaborate detour of pluralising Kant to construct a notion of justice as the maintenance and extension of the plurality of language-games. Terror is construed as the attempt to suppress this plurality and make one game dominate.

The two great dangers to pluralism are the reconstitution of a narrative dogmatism and the dissipation of the powers of language in a superficial exoticism— both lead to a state of monotony or repetition, which is a betrayal of language. For Lyotard, language contains a prescription of plurality and experimentation, language *wants* the unexpected.

But it is when we reflect on just what Lyotard is doing in relation to his previous work that we find a meta-pluralist strategy. In his earlier works such as *Des Dispositifs Pulsionnels* and *Economie Libidinale,* Lyotard advocated what could be called a libidinal pluralism, heavily under the influence of *Anti-Oedipus*. In his latest work, there is a continuity of interest in working out a logic of the unconscious taken now in the sense of Adorno's micrology. The new object of attention is post-modern knowledge and so it demands a new ontology— that of language-games. In the light of this move, Lyotard retrospectively regards his old work as falling too much within a romanticism of the libido and drives, and thus still caught within metaphysics, if seen within its own terms. He prefers now to regard that metaphysics of "libido" as a "move".

Thus if we look at Lyotard's strategy over several works, it implicitly pluralises the notion of ontology at the meta-level as well as at the content level. The ontology is chosen to fit the problematic domain under study and thus takes on the character of a pluri-or flexi-ontology. The general schema of such a flexi-ontology is developed by Deleuze and Guattari, in a way that rejoins up with Feyerabend's notion of a general methodology.

Deleuze and Guattari

With Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari we encounter an explicit attempt to escape the cultural scope-operators I have already mentioned, but it is in Deleuze and Guattari that this project achieves its necessary level of generality. Here my argument becomes much more tentative as Deleuze and Guattari have not

mentioned Feyerabend in their work, nor do they devote much attention to the philosophy of science in the narrow sense.

I start with a purely personal impression. *Anti-Oedipus* seemed to me to be a perfect exercise in Feyerabendian method. The whole endeavour of schizo-analysis to use the delirium of psychosis to analyse psychoanalysis, instead of the reverse, is a model use of counter-induction.

Thus, from the start, the whole ontology of desiring-machines seems to be a move in a more general strategy and this strategy is made explicit in *Rhizome*.

From the start the whole demarcation problematic is cast aside: "there is not and never has been any ideology" (*"Rhizome p12)*, in favour of a model of assemblages of multiplicities i.e. a pluralist ontology. This is the rhizome: a pure multiplicity unsubjugated by any dictatorial unities or dichotomous logic, an assemblage of heterogeneous elements, a machinery not of points and positions but of lines and motions, of multiple connections and disconnections.

It is easy to lapse into a turgid series of abstract terms in discussing Deleuze and Guattari's position because in fact they are producing not a specific ontology, but a general form of an ontology, a pluralist meta-ontology able to generate a whole series of pluralist and monist ontologies as special cases.

Feyerabend discusses such a schema under the name of general methodology and presents Mach as a partial exemplar of its working. A general methodology is an ontology of elements and their combinations which suspends the usual principles of classification such as subject/object, logical consistency, uniform space-time by actively investigating other principles of classification and assemblage. A particular specification of the nature of the elements is entertained as an explicit cosmological hypothesis. The particular cosmological hypotheses used will be not given in advance but determined by the problem domain, the state of discussion and the aims of the researcher. A general methodology is independent of any particular assertion about the world no matter how trivial or obvious but provides a means of examining all such assertions without fixed criteria of judgement.

But even at this level of generality Deleuze and Guattari and Feyerabend are separated over the issue of relativism and we at last see the assumptions shared by Serres, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari. The reception of *Against Method* as principally an anarchistic tract against rationalism in science and philosophy reflects a concern with the politics of multiplicity within a domain. Their shared aim to liberate science from its monist constraints rather than to relativise it: "For science will be

completely mad if one lets it go" *(Rhizome p69)*.

Feyerabend pushes Deleuze and Guattari further in the invention of an abstract ontological machine that allows us to study the various cosmological hypotheses adopted by specific pluralist writers and their possible functioning in a flexi-ontological strategy.

In terms of the schematisation of Pluralism into anarchist, sceptical and relativist strands, we have seen that Serres, Lyotard and Deleuze and Guattari share the anarchist and sceptical strands, but contain only a restricted relativism in relation to science.

It remains to ask why this restriction on relativism takes the particular form it does: a sharp distinction between the physical sciences— which are to be liberated, and the human sciences— which are to be criticised and replaced with something else. This division is basically a positivist one, strongly reinforced by the power of Marxism within French thought.

It is my claim that these avowedly non-Marxist thinkers are still marching within the basic division between the natural and human sciences. Thus, central to their argument, in a way that it is not for Feyerabend is a reference to the recent content of transformations in physics and maths: information theory, fractal objects, fuzzy sets, physics of turbulent fluids, catastrophe theory.

The structure of readings and misreadings that I have sketched can be summarised as follows: we have a French reading of *Against Method* or of pluralism in general which recognises the anarchist and sceptical strands and affirms them but which gives a weakened reading to the strand of relativism. The result of this combination is a moderation of pluralism and the reception of *Against Method* as expounding a familiar position with some good new case-studies. The anglo-american reading is one which weakens the anarchist sceptical strands and thus finds them purely negative and gives a strong emphasis to relativism, thus finding it unacceptable.

The problem that a text such as *Against Method* or a notion such as pluralism raises is one of producing an intersection of traditions that allows us to avoid the weakening stemming from the reading in terms of the enclosure of one particular theoretical context and history. The pluralist texts I have considered seem to me to demand a reading that transcends the context that produced them. In so far as we are trapped by the lure of the

exotic or of the counter-discovery of an Australian exotic we are still moving in a northern matrix. In relation to foreign texts we should all emulate that exemplary Australian, Laslo Toth, who showed us how to philosophise with a hammer.

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Afterword: Remarks on Discussion

Terry Blake

The discussion that followed this paper was intriguing in that it showed a familiar array of forces. First, everyone who spoke in the discussion, except for Paul Patton, spoke against my paper. This was rather depressing. But afterwards, quite a few people told me they liked my paper and its views, creating a totally opposite impression. I noted that most of the people who talked were older, more established figures, with teaching positions. The people after the discussion were younger, not yet employed in an academic full-time job. The criticisms made ranged from a few atavistic relics from the age of phenomenology, who thought my position was too chaotic, to flash imitators of Deleuze's style and vocabulary (but not his ideas) who claimed it was not chaotic enough.

The chief objection was repeated by Meaghan Morris three times in a row: my paper is "theological", "credulous", I "actually seem to believe in Feyerabend", I "actually take sides". Now this objection has a long history (yawn) dating back to the Academic Sceptics (around 200 B.C.) and elevates into a *rule*, a practice we could call Balancing the Binaries. The problem with this rule is that it catapults you into a position of commentary on other peoples' positions and their history without ever having a position of your own— the cataloguing of the genealogist.
Now such a position is fine if your chief task is to give introductory courses on Semiotics — where you have to catalogue a lot of new ideas for people and give it a local flavour. But it is hardly the last word from an epistemological point of view. My paper is about people who have thought through the Binary Blockade. It is easy to see that if you enshrine a rule: Don't

take sides on binaries then you exempt your own position which *has* taken sides on the meta-level (Bad Binary: Do/Don't take sides). This is true even if you never state the rule but merely exemplify it in a habitual critical practice.

Paul Patton was the only one who spoke in favour of my paper He praised it for realizing that "Marxism is based on an utterly inadequate and out of date account of society" (!) I happen to think that this is no news — except to people who were once earnest Marxists and are now the Next Thing After.

Speaking of Prowlers:

Patrick White, Teaching and the Event of Narrative

Tony Thwaites

Tout ceci doit être considérê comme dit par un personnage de roman.
(All this must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel.)

The epigraph above is that of Roland Barthes' book, *Roland Barthes.*[1] It seems a nice disclaimer for a text which moves about between first and third persons in an arbitrary arrangement of fragments, bemused at itself, always approaching or withdrawing from its apparent subject. To compound the irony, it's enough to note that Barthes' publishers, *Editions du Seuil*, also put out a series of monographs on well-known contemporary authors, with titles of the general form *X par lui-même*, most of which are *not "par lui-même"* in the literal sense at all *(Samuel Beckett par lui-même*, for example, carries the name of Ludovic Janvier as author). *roland barthes par roland barthes* seems to be playing an elaborate, elegant and labyrinthine game here, on the very edge of that split between the subject who speaks and the subject who is spoken, where the title and epigraph between them seem to tie up a particular intimacy of the text to the name it carries and to sever it. Yet more irony: the epigraph occurs in what I can only assume is a photo-reproduction of Barthes' own handwriting.

What is going on here? Who *are* all these voices that are called "Roland Barthes", and where are they speaking from? Is this epigraph just a disclaimer after all? Is it even irony? (These aren't just *formal* questions.) Or is it rather another sort of *implication* in the text, the mark of a very particular *vulnerability*? Mobile, tentative, and refusing to totalise, to be sure, but an implication in that most insidious genre of fiction, autobiography? Something which gently dislocates the claim of autobiography to provide

some sort of foreclosure or unity for its subject, which undermines the authority of a book whose title promises any last word on "Roland Barthes", and which leads us straight back out of the possibility of closure and a subject to a *text*, fragmented, arbitrary, already dissimulating and disseminated amongst its many readings. I'd like my use of that sentence as the epigraph to this paper to be not just a disclaimer, but an acknowledgement, for what that's worth, of my own implication in what I think is well considered also as an insidious form of fiction—literary criticism, which, like autobiography, also appears to make the claim, if not to distantiate and dissociate itself from the object of its gaze, at least to have the means of regulating that distance, of keeping it under surveillance and being able to account for what happens in that empty space between the literary text and its commentary.

The point of all these "curlicues of a rhetoric of self-protection", as Meaghan Morris has called them, is that I've found myself trapped in ways I hardly expected when I started writing this paper. For the last two years, I've been a casual tutor teaching courses in modern fiction, in one of which was set the pre-text for this paper, Patrick White's short story *The Night The Prowler*.[2] What I want to do here is not to give a critical account of Patrick White, or of that story, or even of the impossibility of doing either, but speak, or write, on another edge, the one between what a text "says" and what is done with it, between that "set text" and the teaching of it. Now much literary teaching justifies itself (whenever, that is, it is *made* to justify itself) on the grounds that its practice is something which flows quite naturally and inexorably from what the text essentially *is*, that it simply provides the fertile space within which what that text really *is* can unfold, where certain naive errors in conceptualising the text can be wisely but firmly corrected, and where finally the text can lie back calmly and beneficially, exposed to the light of day, free from the ravages of ignorance or barbarism. At the same time this protected flowering of the text marks out a growth of maturity in its student receptacles, and provides, in the paraphernalia of assessment, the means of certifying that maturity. For the purposes of this paper, I'd like to reverse the terms of that argument. What a text is *made to say* is always inseparably bound up with the real situations in which a text is *interrogated*, and in which certain answers are demanded of it. I'd like to speak— and here the dilemmas I mentioned before come in— of a few ways in which the text refuses that specular arrangement of a gaze which knows and a text which is known.

The critical commentator is transformed from an *observer* who *states* the *truth* of the text into a *participant* who *re-performs*

the *drama* of the text, and, in the particular case of the White story, is cast into its most unflattering roles.

As a purely empirical description, *The Night The Prowler* could be characterised as a piece of realist writing: that is, it seems to represent something extra-textual, it's a narrative with plot, characters, a presumed authorial point of view, the lot. But, of course, things don't stop, or even begin, there. First of all, still as sheer representation, it's "about" the effects of power within discourse, particularly within narrative; "about" how narrative is never something as simple as a good story for a good story's sake, but is always something which serves a purpose, has an effect, demands a response or an action, *does* something. And secondly, it's also a text which sets traps and folds back onto itself. The commentator finds that the text has already prepared a position for commentary, and is commenting (in this case, quite devastatingly) on the commentator's commentary.[3] In other words, the story is not just "about" something beyond the text, but "about" what it means to make a story, or a commentary, and what the inevitable connections of power are that this involves and implements. It is itself one of the things it's talking about. Which means, of course, that any commentary (such as this one) cannot help but be even more implicated, perhaps in quite convoluted ways. The story interrogates what's done to it. In effect, and in a purely local way, it reverses the critical procedure whereby an aesthetic interrogates a literary text, and turns to interrogating the types of relays of discursive power which are bound up in that aesthetic.

What *The Night The Prowler* is "about", then (to do that forbidden thing, summarise the plot), is the events which occur in a well-to-do Moore Park family after the daughter, Felicity, appears to have been raped by a prowler who came into her room on the night before the tale begins. In the weeks that follow, Felicity leaves her job with a respectable interior decorator and goes to work in what her parents see as a slightly unsavoury second-hand clothes shop; she breaks off her engagement to an upwardly-mobile young diplomat, and, having less and less to do with her parents, becomes a prowler herself, dressing in leather and making late-night raids to ransack homes in the neighbourhood. Only at this stage do we find out that the rape itself never took place as such. The prowler was real, but the story of the rape is a carefully plotted strategy by Felicity, a weapon against her overbearing and insufferable parents. After a series of small incidents which occur during Felicity's night outings—meetings with old alcoholics and young hippies in the park, with a scared young man in a house she enters, and once, with a

corpse in a lake— she finds an old man dying alone and naked in a derelict house, who, with all the apparent callousness of someone who is past caring, quietly rebuffs her attempts at help or sympathy as sentimentality. The story ends with Felicity heading up the hill in the early morning to report his death to the police.

Such a summary, of course, doesn't give much of an idea of the complexities of the text, let alone move beyond what the story "represents" in the sense of a naive realism. For a start, the narrative is quite pleated and folded upon itself: characters in the stories tell tales which overlap, adjoin, cancel, revise or initiate others. From the very beginning, we are at the scene of a *re*telling, of a story which has already been told several times: to Felicity's parents, to the detectives, to the doctor. A page and a half later, it will be told to Doris Bannister's unseen telephone confidante, Madge Hopkirk, with the implication that it will then filter throughout the neighbourhood. Only about two-thirds of the way through the text do we get the "real version" of what happened. Those inverted commas are there not because there's any reason (at least, that I can see) to doubt the veracity of this version, but because, by this time, coming as it does after several full-scale versions of the tale and many hints at its innumerable refractions around the neighbourhood, as well as ample details of the *effects* it is having, the life of the tale is hardly dependent on criteria as simple as whether it is true or not. The point is twofold. On the one hand, the rape never *literally* took place, and Felicity refuses to be examined by the family doctor presumably because of this. But on the other hand, and because of this first point, the rape is *literally everywhere* in the tales. It is a violence which has no single referent, no one disastrous event which can eventually be absorbed into and obliterated by others, a violence not of what is told but *of the telling*. To tell the tale is to repeat the rape endlessly, not in the sense of bringing to mind another representation of an unfortunate event best forgotten, but in the sense that, from Felicity's first telling of it, the story is a strategy, a weapon of words inserted into a particular machinery in order to dislocate it. And this machinery has always functioned as a battle machine rather than a truth machine: there is something *at stake* here, and it isn't whatever might have "really" happened. We are in a fiction where fiction itself is being used as a deadly weapon.

So, if there are tales within tales here, it's not just a matter of a formal or aesthetic artifice of nesting boxes. Neither is it, in the manner of much post-Derridean criticism, a question of a text which reveals its abyssal nature and the impossibility of framing it. It's rather that narrative exists only in what I shall call an

exchange, a marking of what circulates, where discourse circulates with many things, many of them not discursive. Certain relays of power develop, an exchange which perhaps *produces* but does not function *according to* principles of regulation, as it may involve the gratuitous just as much as the ordered. The awareness or at least utilisation of this seems to be at work in so many narratives written before and during what could be very crudely labelled as the rise of the romantic aesthetic of the autonomy of the literary object: the elaborate frame-tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*: the exchanges of *The Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*; the epistolary novel; the many spurious versions of *Don Quixote* which become absorbed into the second part of the "real" *Don Quixote*, and Cervantes' insistence that he is only reworking and translating somebody else's book anyway; the epic tale contest, or the recapitulation of his travels which Alcinous demands of Odysseus in return for his hospitality.... It goes on. What is operating here is an insistence that narrative is always something which *acts*, and acts by its existence in an exchange, where it is given away, appropriated, demanded, offered, and itself demands some sort of response, action, commentary, proliferation. Before speaking is expression of an individual or a truth, it is an immersion in the flux of language.

In passing, it seems to me that this hypothetical rise of an aesthetic of autonomy is accompanied by other overlapping, parallel or disjunct movements which, if the aesthetic of autonomy offers the literary text the unlimited freedom of the individual, serve to insert that apparent autonomy in a whole network of control. Indeed, the unlimited freedom of the individual is nothing more than an alibi for power, or a new way in which it can act. If movable type and the eventual industrialisation of printing and publishing caused an immense proliferation of texts and altered their entire social circulation, these factors also served to privitise the text in an unprecedented way, by making it the production of a rapidly privitised technology and the property— both in the legal sense, and in a new sense, the *critical*— of an author. For along with this privitisation come other new factors which work in effect to *police* the readings of literary texts and the relays into which they can enter. I am using the term "police" here in the sense in which it entered into discussion in a vast literature of its own, round about the middle of the eighteenth century when that aesthetic of autonomy seems to arise: that of the *cura promovendi salutem*, the concern to develop or promote happiness or the public good. For example, here is what Cesare Beccaria Bonesana, holder of

the Chair of Political economy and science of police at Milan, says in the notes of a course delivered in 1769:

> But, neither the products of the earth, nor those of the work of the hand, nor mutual commerce, nor public contributions can ever be obtained from men with perfection and constancy if they do not know the moral and physical laws of the things upon which they act...; if, among the multiplicity of individuals, works and products one does not at each step see shining the light of order, which renders all operations easy and sure. Thus, *the sciences, education, good order, security and public tranquillity, objects all comprehended under the name of police*, will constitute the fifth and last object of public economy.[4] (my emphasis)

The passage is remarkable for its programmatic desire to introduce the regulation of reason and public benefit into the exchange of all that which, in the waning of the three-tiered society of the medieval legacy, threatens to remain unregulated and formless. And here, regulation is not so much a simple principle of *prohibition* as the vast *labour of formation* of a social body, of what the eighteenth century called the good order of a population: not a *repression* of what was *already* there and undesirable, but an active *production* of what was *never* previously there but now intensely desired. In England, contemporaries of this broad movement, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne (a printer, a magistrate and a clergyman) are writing texts which are fascinated with what texts *do*, how they overflow and encroach, and how textuality is always a matter of power. And at the same time we have the appearance of a new literary phenomenon— the state institution devoted solely to that apparently most useless of pastimes, literary criticism.

But I'm not concerned here with a possible Foucauldian study of the rise of an institution. It happens that I'm studying literary texts at one of these institutions and teaching them at another, and concerned here with a few of the quite specific imbrications of text, teaching practice and institution upon each other, and some of the knottily complex ways in which each of those terms is hollowed out in its articulation with the others. Point number one: *Everywhere in narration and the processes and productions of narrative exchange in which it exists, there is something at stake.* The frequent complaint, "Why should we be forced to pull a text

apart like this, why not just enjoy it?", is perhaps not after all a plea for a vague sentimentality of what you feel over what you know, but an insistent objection to playing a loaded game.

That the literary institution is the site of certain quite clear relays of power, of a specifically *discursive* power, seems to need no explanation. These discursive structures serve, in effect, to define what one does with a text, what one seeks in it, even the very fact that a text *is* something one *seeks* for things in. They define (still as an effect) what knowledge there is to be sought in or of a text, and with that a whole paraphernalia of what the conditions of holding this knowledge are, who holds it and how, what this knowledge represents or legitimises, and what it holds illegitimate, or at least not part of its domain. And they mark one out (yet again, as their effect) as one who is, to a greater or lesser degree, literate or unlettered, mature or a young barbarian, at the same time that they mark out a series of quite definite pathways to literacy and maturity.

The trouble with this sort of image of power, as Foucault points out in his study of sexuality,[5] is that it is the image power has *of itself*, as alibi, as displacement, something which never ceases to justify itself by reference to categories such as "pure reason", "common sense" or a "common pursuit". It catalogues the effects of power, without interrogating its processes. It rests on a concept of power as basically prohibitive, censoring, negating, providing an enclosed space from which disruption is excluded. This concept ignores the immense and entirely *positive* labour of formation (control, surveillance, policing) with which power is incessantly engaged. It creates an inside and an outside to discourse, where there are now things which cannot or must not be spoken, and in doing so it separates discourse from events by making it something which serves first to *represent* an event, rather than treating it as a particular type of event itself, and one which inevitably proliferates into an entire series of events. And it fails to account for the way in which power is *produced in* discourse, at its points of application, and not merely *administered* by a logos or ethos beyond all discourse.

Power is not a metaphysical fluid which accumulates in places and deserts others. It is always at stake in the event, a process rather than a structure, something which topologises all structures, sets them in motion and hollows out new and as yet indeterminate spaces in which there is yet more at stake. When, in *The Night The Prowler*, Felicity claims she has been raped, she is not proclaiming her possession of the family power, but the total *dis*possession of that power: the violence and violation of an intruding weapon into a previously intact space which, whatever

the immediate recuperations of that familial power, will remain forever marked by the event. Doris Bannister consoles herself and her husband by saying, "I expect it will bring John (the fiancé)and Felicity closer together. They'll try harder to please each other" (NP127), but this is simply to replace the *less* of the lost virginity with the *more* of a shared affection: to perpetuate, in other words, the sheer *excess* of the unforeseen impossible rape. Something has changed here, and changed utterly, and no amount of recuperation (but that is not the point of recuperation) will return things to their original state: something new has been thrown into the game. That the "true" story of the events of that evening only occurs two-thirds of the way through the text emphasises the dispossession and mobility of this power which is at stake: *from its very first telling*, Felicity's story (and the rape *is* this story) was *always and already other than hers*. What's at stake here is not whether the tale's true, or the individual intentions of the tellers are pure ("White as social satirist"), but the processes of discursive power which traverse both tales and tellers, and which the very act of telling the tale and commenting on it is causing to shift underfoot.

It is these processes that, in a very real and disturbing sense, *The Night The Prowler* is "about": what the effects of discourse in its proliferating exchange are, and what effects of power are concomitant with telling a story, or with commentary. The trick is that *The Night The Prowler* is also one of those stories it talks about, that it too is something to be commented on endlessly in its own institutionalised situations and relays of power, and with its own stakes. Commentary is here not just something performed *on* a text by a critic, but something the text performs *on itself*. With the collapse of that empty space between text and commentary, criticism is robbed of its putative status as *metalanguage*, and becomes a continuation and reproduction of the struggles the text stages. Whether the critic chooses to be a dutiful son or daughter of the text, heeding, inheriting, preserving and transmitting its presumed authorial patrimony, or a benevolent parent providing that protected and fertile space in which the text can unfold into what it really is (the image of its parents), the critic is trapped into reperforming the text's nefarious little domestic drama.The critic plays roles which the text has already clearly and sardonically defined.

As we have seen, rape is both everywhere and nowhere in this tale: nowhere, in that what the word seems to signify is an event which never actually took place as such, and everywhere, in that the proliferating tales are the rape, a violence and a violation, intended to wound, dislocate, dispossess. The violence here is

not anterior to discourse, something which discourse *represents*, but *discourse itself*. We have also seen how recuperation ("they'll try harder to please each other") does not so much annul that violence as perpetuate it as excess. Repossession, in other words, is posited upon dispossession. Which brings me to the second point I want to make, actually a stronger version of the first: *narration marks out within an economy of possessions.*

Economy is a somewhat different matter from exchange, which, as I used the term earlier on, includes also the gratuitous, the unregulated, the excessive. With the term "economy", though, I mean to imply the entering into play, as an effect, of a principle of regulation or parsimony. In the revised version of "What is an Author?",[6] Foucault concludes with the suggestion that the author is not so much the luxuriant source of the text's significations as a principle of thrift in the text, a way of observing and controlling its semiosis, that which limits, and in limiting guarantees a certain value to the text (which it is then the critic's duty to explicate). The author is a textual construct whose historical appearance is contemporary with that of political economy:

> The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations....In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion.[7]

That narrative exists as exchange simply states the obvious: narrative is an event amongst others. But that it is part of an economy implies a new set of questions, this time concerned with terms which are also terms of a political economy. *Value*: What is the *best* response to a text, or the *truest*? *Equivalence*: What is the text *saying*? what other discourses is it parallel to or cognate with? what does it *represent* (that is, how can we best set up relations of equivalence between it and an "outside" world or conceptual system)? *Filiation*: What is it *intended* to represent? Or *possession*: What does the author *mean*?

That a thing may be possessed is, like value, filiation or equivalence, a quality which arises only in an economy: that is, with the possibility of not possessing it. Possession depends on mobility, and on the fluxes which mobilise. To possess is not to be the origin or the end result of an economy, but to be the bearer of its exchanges, a nodal and transient point within them. The problem is not that of whether the text is empirically possessed,

appropriated or safeguarded by this or that author, critic or institution. The text functions within a narrative economy whereby the text is both possession *and* unpossessed or dispossessed: the extraordinary fluidity of that double edge whereby possession only exists within an economy which mobilises *all* positions and thus dispossesses as it gives possession. *The very question of possession of the text is itself dispossessed.* To speak is not primarily to tell one's story, in any of the more or less sophisticated ways in which the concept arises in much literary criticism: as self-expression, as a lesson in human nature, as an affirmation of the individual or his or her freedom. It is to offer oneself up to (be offered up to) an economy of discourse, to be dispossessed of place in the very entering into play in the discursive machinery which distributes and assigns place. And it is here, in these multiplicities of confrontation and displacement where there is always something at stake, that power has its anchorage in discourse.

There is another question, a form of the previous one, that I have been trying to displace here: that of Patrick White as "social critic". After all, that a text can be concerned with something called "social criticism" is a commonplace found in criticism of even the most reactionary political hue. The term says, in itself, precisely nothing about the politics within which a text acts, be it literary or critical: it covers everything, and specifies nothing. More: there are ways in which the concept of social criticism can work to defuse a text, to neutralise it, to make the "proper" response to it the equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders which concedes in effect that there isn't, after all, anything much to be done. If the text's main function is to *represent* a society (even if critically), then the text is reduced to a mere spectacle for the knowing eye. It is something which unfolds and reveals its and its society's truth before a gaze whose only implication in the text *is* this passive unfolding and revelation. The gaze is separated from the text by a qualitative difference of *structure*, a writerly *distanciation* or a critical *perspective*— the visual metaphors all serve to guarantee the separation in kind of the text and what is done to it. Thus, White's texts are often reduced, in criticism, to the spectacle of the Australian malaise, where embattled visionaries are surrounded by a nation of philistines, and the Australians who are the assumed object of this satire are always, in a silent elision of concepts, *other* Australians. Perhaps, on the contrary, such interpretation is not so much a representation (by an author, abetted by a critic) of a world outside the text, but the *reperformance within* the text, by the critic, abetted by an author of the drama of the articulations in teaching practice and literary

methodology which are the situations that give rise to the critical commentary, and which have already prepared within them the positions of the one who knows and the ignorant many. "Australian society" takes as its silent model the literature class.

If "social criticism", then, is a matter of repossessing a text for a particular perspective or practice, I am similarly trying to displace here the question of whether White himself is in a sense "really" a political revolutionary, or whether his texts are potentially disruptive or revolutionary texts which have been devalued and recuperated by a bourgeois criticism, and which thus need the ministrations of a radical criticism to redeem them for the left.[8] Recuperation is not something which befalls a text, literary or critical, because its assumed contents are insufficiently radical: it is a process which works on that discursive, implementative edge where power is both the staging *by* literary and critical texts, as representation, and the staging *of* texts, in their institutional and critical relays.

At the end of the scene in *The Night The Prowler* where Humphrey and Doris Bannister are tearfully consoling each other over their daughter's rape, a narrative voice asks the rhetorical questions, *"But who was Felicity today? Or, for that matter, who was Felicity ever?"* (NP126) Now it is clear that this voice does not belong to any of the characters in the story, but then neither can the complexities that are at work here be elided under the simple generality of an "authorial voice". Who is speaking? Does this question even make sense? The only pronoun, or linguistic "shifter", in the two sentences is a repeated "who", which refers us not beyond the text to a removed speaker, but back *into* the text, to Felicity, and in such a way as to call into doubt that what this name refers to is ever anything more than a dispersal of quite disjunct processes and effects. That they are rhetorical questions is also important, for they do not, as the rhetorical question often does, imply an answer so obvious that it is begged by the simple statement of the question: here, there is *no* answer, no distanciated authorial perspective which can speak the answer or even demonstrate its being worked out in the narrative (the story ends not with any revelation which can totalise the previous events, but with Felicity's heading up the hill to the police station "in the dizzy course of perpetual becoming" — which is not even the dizzy course of *her* becoming). The voice appears to raise itself up from the text momentarily in order to throw one back into the text even more firmly, to entangle one even further in its weave: what is speaking is not an author beyond his text, but the *text itself*; and the ground from which it speaks is not authority (for this voice does not know either) but

the shifting surface of textuality. As Barthes says of the plurality of voices of the classical (representational) narrative,

> The best way to conceive the classical plural is...to listen to the text as an iridescent exchange carried on by multiple voices, on different wavelengths and subject from time to time to a sudden *dissolve*, leaving a gap which enables the utterance to shift from one point of view to another, without warning: the writing is set up across this tonal instability (which in the modern text becomes atonality), which makes it a glistening texture of ephemeral origins.[9]
>
> (Barthes' italics)

Writing is always being pushed aside by a jostle of other voices which bubble up in its interstices. It is not a piece of writerly solipsism to say that writing is constantly displaced not by the intrusions of a rude and purely factitious reality beyond the text, but *by writing itself*, for the reality which incessantly intrudes on the text is always and already textual itself. That is, reality is not a firm inert substratum of empirical and verifiable facts anterior to all discourse, but a complex, shifting discursive and textual production. The unimaginable thing-in-itself, whatever that might be, never enters into discourse to silently correct it or bear it out. But words do, words which designate or signify that supposed thing, not as their essence but as their own horizon, words with histories which are those of battles rather than the ever-broadening path of truth: *to convince* is *con* + *vincere*, to overcome.

In *Beginnings*, Edward Said points out how: "throughout the whole range of experience of writing", there is:

> a constant reminder that writing is a form of displacement. For although quotation can take many forms, in every one the quoted passage symbolises other writing as encroachment, as a disturbing force moving potentially to take over what is presently being written. As a rhetorical device, quotation can serve to accommodate, to incorporate, to falsify (when wrongly or even rightly paraphrased), to accumulate, to defend, or to conquer—but always, even when in the form of a passing illusion, it is a reminder that other writing serves to displace present writing, to a greater or lesser extent, from its absolute, central proper place.[10]

To accommodate, incorporate, falsify, accumulate, defend, or conquer— and never simply just to *reveal*— these are the functions which quotation performs in writing, just as they are the functions which narrative performs in what I have called a narrative exchange. Writing, in Said's argument, and narrative, in mine, are neither originated nor guaranteed by an anterior truth. They produce what Foucault has called multiple *truth-effects* on their surfaces. These effects do not function in order to reflect a reality of another order. If they have concrete and specific genealogies and distributions, it is not because these are more or less necessary filiations in history of an essential truth, but because writing, as event, is always a contingent locus of relations of power.

The second of those two rhetorical questions has already hinted at this: "Or, for that matter, who was Felicity *ever*?" That last word makes it an oversimplification to say that Felicity is someone who has been robbed of her proper place by parents, alienation, or whatever: the text makes her a multiplicity of positions in a series of narratives with no originary and no final term, where the "real Felicity" is something which is an endless regression into the past ("who was Felicity ever?") or an endless postponement (the end of the *text* is a "dizzy course of perpetual becoming"). That elusive "real Felicity", which, after all, is the only one her parents have ever claimed to know, has never been anything more than an alibi for power: that whichhas always been at stake in the constant and positive labour of formation which the process of narrativisation operates, the trajectory of an infinitely repeated wager. When Humphrey and Doris Bannister make their frequent declarations of knowing Felicity, it is to place her even further by displacing her into a series of other narratives, such as those of a normal or modern childhood, and of the uneasy compromise between them ("I know what girls are like nowadays. I know there's all this sleeping around"), of her own upbringing ("I can't believe...you're the girl Daddy and I brought up"), of Felicity's own confidences, which are themselves, of course, far from transparent revelations of her situation, but more like tools to be used ("But I'm *certain*— from...the little one's own child confides— I'm pretty sure that Felicity was chaste"). Everywhere narrative regresses into other narratives, other discourses, effecting a play of multiple shimmering relations of power, the site of which is Felicity.

Narrative is excessive. It does not assign fixed positions which it then delineates and safeguards by procedures of exclusion and

prohibition, so much as by its incessant proliferation produce a multiplicity of positions which it traverses with a language that is perhaps fragmentary or discontinuous but nevertheless insistent. If discourse in general is an exchange within which power finds its locuses— that is, if its effects of power are not due to qualities inherent within the isolated statement or utterance and its relation to what it signifies, but to the movements of circulation within that exchange— then power acts not by prohibiting speech of a certain kind, or delineating the areas within which speech can operate and those where it hesitates and finds it cannot pass, but by what Foucault calls an incessant *incitement to discourse*.[11] This is the third general point: *narration is a marking of an injunction to speak*.

Everywhere in *The Night The Prowler* there are hesitations, things seemingly left unsaid, falterings of speech before things it seems to abhor. Even the title is an unfinished statement which seems to dread naming just what the prowler did on that night. But what is operating here is not a repression of something so dreadful that it cannot be spoken, and which language forever circles without naming: it is an insistence that speech multiply, and even more so when an apparent break has occurred in the relays of power of which it is part. What the title seems to refuse to name, the tale names repeatedly, and crisscrosses that apparently empty spot with an urgent, convoluted and proliferating speech. One thing everybody in the story *does* talk about is rape. Humphrey Bannister finds the talks on purity he gives his adolescent daughter frightfully embarrassing— but speak he does, against all embarrassment, and many times at that. Doris Bannister says over and over that words cannot describe the horror of what has just happened, but she does this in a flood of words which insist on speaking of it:

> "...you can't imagine what we've been through...I'll tell you, Madge, in *strictest* confidence...You must be patient with me, Madge dear...I can hardly bring myself to say it...give me a chance, darling..." (NP121-2)

She needs to speak, despite all of Humphrey's enjoinders to the contrary, but her breach of his protocol is no threat to the assimilation of the real danger, the rape. Where prohibited speech is repression, enjoined speech may be repair.

These are all, still, cases of an injunction to speech which is *represented* by the text, as its "content". As representations, they seem to have no more than the status of any other possible *interpretations* of the text, which is "about" repression, or the

rebellion of the young, or a variety of the Australian malaise. What makes these representations more interesting here is that this particular "about" refuses to lie down and be enclosed placidly within the framework of representation. The text represents a series of injunctions to speak, but is itself enmeshed in other series of the same injunction. Criticism and its inseperable relays of teaching and dissemination themselves enjoin an incessant speech upon the text: the literary text is almost by definition that which is inexhaustible to criticism. This inexhaustibility is not the index of the text's almost mystical ability to transcend any finite interpretation put on it, but of its existence in a quite secular semiosis and exchange, of relays of power and of an entire history of all the things one does with texts. What this text, *The Night The Prowler* is staging is the machineries of power in which narration, commentary and their proliferation are implicated. In its injunction to speak, and speak endlessly, of a text, and in its articulations within institutional practices which provide the situations where one *must* speak as part of that endless discourse, criticism runs more than a risk of finding itself repeating the recuperating, pleated movements of discourse in which Felicity finds herself trapped. And this is to a very large extent regardless of the good intentions of the critic. Good will may not be what's at stake here: common sense has its own terrorism. But then neither, obviously, is the simple antithesis of an ill-willing delinquency sufficient, for the machinery that thrives on the good will of individuals easily privatises that into a set of individual aberrations— which is part of the mechanism dramatised in White's story. And silence is hardly an answer, the simple refusal to speak of a literature and institutions which are both already laid out within power, or to speak of them only in order to dismiss. Silence is still a positioning within discourses which continue on all sides, and is itself a further object of discourse: Felicity's silence is taken by her parents as a sign that there is something *more deeply* wrong with her, and starts up even more of the recuperative processes. Silence seems to lead only to a willed or forced autism and powerlessness. Language has no outside, merely positions of relative order and delinquency within it. Yet none of these has any guarantee of an inherent or necessary radicalism. The radicality of each depends solely on the effects of its tactics in its reloading of the game.

In a sense, we can speak of Felicity and the text almost in the same breath, yet without conflating the two. This is because this incitement to discourse is something which traverses the entire textual process- not only the narrative events which the text

represents (Felicity's rebellion against her parents) but also the narrational events which represent the text (the relays of criticism and teaching). The result of this is effectively a psychologisation of both text and Felicity. That is, such an injunction to speak privatises the entire discursive process into a series of individual states (or even pathologies) which are locked in struggle with each other. It becomes a process which is not so much social as interindividual, where discourse is not the knotted and deadly substance of the struggle, but the relatively transparent medium by which a struggle on another level altogether (the personal or the moral) is carried out: an affair of the depths of disturbed bodies which express themselves in language, rather than a circulation across a social plane which gives rise to, positions and implicates these individualities. Let's note that psychologisation is, after all, one of the strategies Felicity's parents use against her: she's become a problem, she's passing through a phase like all children do, deep down she's basically our Felicity. Felicity, meanwhile, is trying her hardest to rupture an entire semiosis in which she is immersed, in a literally immediate way. In ransacking the houses in the neighbourhood, she is not making an indirect attack on her parents, via the trappings of bourgeois comfort which symbolise or represent them, but attacking directly the objects of that economy of possession of which the familial is only a part. Humphrey and Doris Bannister are not the final hidden meaning which all these statuettes, sheepskin rugs and leather chairs keep locked up in their depths: to insist on this may well just be to repeat in a slightly different form her parents' demand— that she be accountable to them, and accountable for by them.

What matters in these processes of struggle and possible recuperation, then, is not a "real" Felicity, whatever that might be, but the multitude of positions she is forced to occupy within a series of situations, exchanges, discourses. From the beginning, Felicity is not just surrounded by the *signs* of possession, but is herself *part* of the whole circuit of possession: something owned by her parents, the object of negotiations with another potential possessor, her fiance, in an arrangement which *"became a communal triumph"*. (NP137) The mark of her function within such an economy is her viginity— which is both the object of her contestation and that which is totally other than hers:"I've written breaking off the engagement. For a number of reasons. The least of them being the loss of Daddy's old virginity." (NP131) Here Felicity is not simply contesting what this virginity signifies, say by turning it into an affirmation of herself rather than of her dispossession: in denying it any importance, she is denying that

it *does* even signify. But then in an economy all signs are already signs of a dispossession. Contestation may alter a stake, but it cannot guarantee more than that. There is always the possibility of the most unexpected recuperations. Humphrey Bannister, planting portulacas in the garden, mentions the ransacking of Harvey Makin's house to Felicity without realising that she is the culprit, and— curiously—applauds it:

> "Well, good luck to 'em. I hope they got their thrill. Harvey was always a smooth, self-satisfied beggar, and his house the type of mausoleum asking for rape."
>
> She could see him shrink on realising his blunder, sweat gathering on the back of his neck, fingers blenching as they firmed the soil round a seedling.
>
> "As a matter of fact, that's how the *Sun* referred to it."... Lacking the courage to look up, he couldn't have known that she was shocked. She was, though: not for his use of a word with unfortunate personal overtones, nor his casual mention of an incident for which she was responsible, but for his pleasure in what was a brutal act by his own standards. (NP158)

The shock is that Felicity, quite unwittingly, has all but been doing her father's bidding: for all of the disturbingly wrong reasons, he approves. And if the rape itself never took place as the isolated incident which her parents imagine, then Daddy's virginity is in intact. More, it is even safeguarded as Felicity, a prowler herself, roams around in a "protective skin of slithery leather" (NP147): not lost, but taken for safekeeping, much as Doris Bannister earlier defied her husband's interdiction in speaking to Madge Hopkirk of the rape, yet set another machinery of possible recuperation going by doing so.

But what are these recuperations? They are not the restoration of a structure and the annihilation of all resistance to it. In a sense, all they do is affirm what has already been said anyway: that Felicity's contestation has always been other than hers (by virtue of its *being* contestation), and that her position within it has now shifted. The very end of the tale, where Felicity sets off to report the old man's death to the police, is not so much a narrative resolution in which she is symbolically received back into the world she has rejected, as a *dis*solution, remobilising, scattering and making indeterminate all signs in this exchange:

> So she continued up the hill to report the death of an old man she had discovered a few moments before, but

> knew as intimately as she knew herself, in solitariness, in desolation, as well as in what would seem to be the dizzy course of perpetual becoming. (NP168)

Perhaps this *is* some sort of affirmation of her individuality, but it is a peculiar one. Not only does the form of the simile blur the distinction between her and the man— the solitariness, desolation and dizzy course apply equally to her knowledge of both— but it also implies an insidious backwards movement. If Felicity knows the man as well as she knows herself, then she also only knows herself as well as this man "she had discovered a few moments before" and who is now dead. What the story has suggested just previous to this is that she knows neither. She has offered him various consolations— of having friends who must surely visit him, of memories, of her own companionship, and, in desperation, of the beauty of the fall of light on the wall— all of which he rebuffs: he has no visitors, his memories are of easy pissing and shitting, she can show him nothing, and the light doesn't go away with the rats. All that she can offer him are, ironically enough, the "half-remembered precepts from a code of popular morality" which "made her feel she ought to *bully* him back into a *proper* frame of mind"(NP165—my emphasis). Here Felicity, the delinquent, is the one who seeks to normalise, and runs into an absolute refusal from a dying man who no longer has anything at stake. All that he will finally accept is something that is quite devoid of consolation:

> She took his hand and held it as though she had got possession of all knowledge. "At least I can keep the rats at bay, and you needn't expect more of me than of anyone else."
>
> "Yes," he said.
>
> In his relief he slightly jogged a tea chest on which his teeth were standing.
>
> "No rats," he sighed. "And an easy piss."
>
> For he had begun to urinate; and as she watched it trickle over the withered thighs, her own being was flooded with pity.
>
> "That's *something*, isn't it?" She was so grateful for their common release from the myths to which they had been enslaved, she only slowly realised the hand she was holding in hers had died. (NP168—White's emphasis.)

The last words of direct speech in the text are, again, a rhetorical

question which can have no answer. Felicity's last upsurge of sentimentality is also the old man's last piss. She is in solitariness not because she has unearthed the true individual Felicity, but because she has lost that Felicity with the man's death and that of the "myths"; in desolation because these myths were the only consolation. The remaining dozen lines of the text dissolve and disperse the individual and personal, spread it out into images of a multiplicity of interactions and fluxes: a neighbourhood which starts its daily business, an ant colony which weaves "without end, through a navel of sand, into the body of the earth". The text neither affirms a magical freedom from this exchange of power, discourse and contestation, nor narrates the inevitable collapse of a small rebellion. It simply renders both indeterminate, a wager— whatever might happen "after the end of the story"— to be continued.

There are several lines, at the multiple conjunctures of which the text is made, in both criticism and the practices of teaching, to reperform endlessly Felicity's struggle. The first may appear rather naive, or obvious. It is the critical practice which finds the truth of the text in its characters and their interrelations, their personal psychologies and tragic flaws and the stories which supposedly devolve from these, their specific and evocative individualities or their capabilities of representing a human condition. The text is simply a microcosm of the real world, and thus in speaking about it one is simply talking about "life" (that monstrous abstraction to know which one needs no training other than in sensitivity): the question of the text *as text* just does not arise. Perhaps this is naive, but that is not the point: English Literature is a compulsory part of every school course, much high-school and tertiary discussion of texts confines itself exclusively to such issues (often with a cynical contempt of the abilities of its audience to understand concepts other than these), and the most widely-used critical texts are doubtless cribs such as the much-detested Monarch Notes. A second line develops the figure of the author, that textual construct which, both infinitely precious and infinitely vulnerable, serves to authorise the critical discourse as its necessary protection. The author also acts as a catch-all repository for those features of the text which patently do not have as their function a simple reflection of the world: these become authorial commentary on that world, a filtering through a sensitive consciousness, the distortion in the mirror. The relation of the author to that world is specular: the author sees, knows. Between the two edges of representation, the represented world and the representing author, there is an essential difference of regime, an

unbridgeable gap which sets the author against that represented world, of which, because it is a representation of the *real world,* that author is nevertheless part. Thus the figure of the alienated author, to whom one reacts with a mixture of an awe for creativity and a certain indulgence ("talented but difficult", like a maladjusted child). Psychologisation of the text produces the author, who is then further psychologised between the norm and the pathological: psychology has always been a normative process. It is on this line that the category of "social criticism" finds its home (its very existence is often taken as a sign of health of that very society it is held to criticise). If this line privatises the production of the text into an individual and inspired creativity, then a third line privatises the reading of the text into a personal and sensitive consumption. This line marks out the figure of the literate reader, the one for whom the text represents, again at a specular remove which this time guarantees— because it is different in regime from both represented world and representing author— not an alienated pathology but a community of normalcy. The very concept of an individual response is, like that of the individual itself, a normative one: the social becomes a matter of a consensus of individualities, and the formation of this community of normalcy a labour of policing, in the sense in which I used the word earlier. Thus F.R. Leavis, writing in the early 1950s but in a discourse which is still with us, can use the terms of the eighteenth century discourses on public hygiene and political economy to speak of the need "to inquire into the nature and conditions of cultural health and prosperity", in ways which echo strikingly the earlier words of Cesare Beccaria of the Milan chair of science of police:

> Without the sensitising familiarity with the subtleties of language, and the insight into the relations between abstract or generalising thought and the concrete of human experience, that the trained frequentation of literature alone can bring, the thinking that attends social and political studies will not have the edge and force it should.[12]

The terms are no more metaphorical and no less programmatic for Leavis than they were for Beccaria.

But a fourth line, or rather a fourth set of lines, dispersed and discontinuous, weaves its way through all of these like those impossible topological curves which intersect themselves at every point. These lines are those of literature as a discursive practice, as writing, institution, criticism and teaching. Whereas

the three previous lines have marked out a realm of aesthetics in their spacings, interstices and disjunctions, this fourth set marks out the space of a politics, that politics which was never really absent from the first three, but for which they functioned as alibi, as representation. Indeed, it is only due to this enveloping line that the first three have their existence. Here, they find their positivity: discourse's real accumulations, fragmentations, dispersions and specific histories of the contingent, as against representations's theology of origins, totalities, teleologies and a general and deducible History of the necessary. That is, the discourses and practices of literary criticism are not the relatively passive expression of a knowledge of the literary text, whose authority lies simply in the truth that it extracts and articulates from such texts, and which gradually and inexorably unravels itself within a generalised "history of thought". They are traversed by a multiplicity of relations of power, and find their *genealogies* (in Nietzsche's sense of a "genealogy of morals") in a whole series of overlapping, disjunct and dispersed events. The concept of discipline in education,[13] for example— to deliberately choose an instance which literary criticism generally feels it has little to do with, but invokes incessantly— does not have the linear history of an institutional response to problems which are "purely educational" and which grow with an inherent necessity out of matters which are internal to the nature of that which is to be taught. Discipline itself arises as a problem and a technology of formative policing in a whole matrix of practices throughout Europe by the late eighteenth century. Techniques of discipline— the enclosure, partitioning and internal distributions of a space or grouping, functional investitures and serial structures such as ranking within these, the timetable whose economy of a use of time elaborates a controlled temporal rhythm, the articulation of individual bodies within a precise network of command, procedures of examination which are also those of surveillance and confession, even an architecture which makes these processes not only possible but unavoidable— all these at this time become matters of immediate concern not only in the classroom but in a great social trajectory of institutions as widely different as the military, the prisons, the workplace, the hospitals, and the host of secondary apparatuses which arose, often modelled openly on the penal system, to deal with those new figures of public concern on the fringes of legality, the orphan, the delinquent, the "chronically idle", the endangered minor....

All of which takes us a long way from literary criticism. This is precisely the point. For here, without reducing criticism to a

simply disciplinary milieu, we have a complex series of inter-articulated procedures, strategies and imperatives which are not only accepted in their specific relevant forms by the discourses of literary criticism and the teaching of literature as necessary constraints within which, for better or worse, such teaching must lie— the institutional demand for some form of assessment, the necessity for a certain timetabling and architecture to provide maximum flexibility and usage of material and personal resources, the automatic distinction between teacher and student which an apparatus which centralises and disseminates knowledge cannot avoid— but which are also thoroughly implicated in theorisations of the literary text, methodologies of teaching literature, the very conceptualisation of the text as object of a particular sort of knowledge. The relationships which criticism constructs between author and text, reader and text, author and reader, for example— relations which are far from as self-evident as they seem, and in their modern forms date only from the eighteenth century— enable the student-teacher relation, whatever its separate histories and functions, to be represented as a natural extension of them.

Once again, the questions to be asked become displaced. In such an ensemble, it is not a matter of how "extra-literary" considerations are at best silent constraints on and at worst complete falsifications of what is to be taught, of how criticism is ultimately an ideological practice through which the State exercises its hegemony, and which thus needs to be abandoned or purged, or even of placing criticism on a truer, perhaps more scientific footing. What is in question here is the way in which power does not *repress* and *falsify* truth, but actively *produces* a series of practices which act as a formative policing. The institutional sites of these practices, and a multiplicity of discourses whose functions in relation to those practices are not primarily those of reflecting or representing their truth, but of implementing, legitimating, programming and authorising them. I have used Foucault's example of the movements of technologies of discipline to suggest the type of investigation that may determine the historical positivities within which the enterprises of literary teaching and criticism can be located. Such an investigation is, of course, beyond the limits of this article. Nevertheless, the example serves to sketch out the terrain of such genealogies, and to demonstrate one or two of the ways in which the phenomena of criticism and teaching are far from an autonomous internal historical development striving after its own clarity, but instead a series of disjunct and dispersed movements which traverse that curious object to which they give rise, the

"literary text", from outside. Perhaps the teaching of literature is only a relatively unimportant by-product of these, the residue of much wider movements and technologies, and exists as such only because it is this residue, a bricolage of techniques and representations who functionality has historically been developed in more pressing areas than that of the reading of literature. I strongly suspect that this is the case.

Criticism *as representation*, then, appears to orient itself around three main axes: the world which the text represents, the author by whom the text represents, and the reader for whom the text represents. I have suggested that it is the figure of the critic which operates and results in this triangulation: the critic as the invisible fourth term which keeps the other three apart, which necessitates their separation and inserts itself into the space so formed precisely to guarantee the necessity of its own activity. But the difficulty is that these three terms— represented world, representing author, receptive reader— are all *themselves* representations. They describe ideal events that have never happened and never will happen; but then, like all representations, their real function has always been to implement rather to reflect. Paradoxically, their ability to affect (or effect) the real lies in their ideality. Their relations to each other lie not in the welter of more or less sophisticated theorisations which they offer, always after the event, but in the positivity of a genealogy of practices and events, some of the parameters and outlines of which I have hinted at in a very cursory way. A genealogy where representation no longer seems a self-evident fact, where its terms become fractured and scattered into a myriad of functional assemblages which no longer represent anything: the clear outlines of a reflected world become blurred, and behind the mirror, where they have always been, the vast and unseen movements of power begin to make themselves felt.

I have tried to show above how the critical enterprise can easily end up producing a discourse that is so far from critical (in the broader sense of the term) that at its limit it can do no more than reperform the drama of a text such as *The Night The Prowler* on a different stage, while representing this reperformance as interpretation or explication. But this is not because there is a general and universal strategy of psychologisation or privatisation which can manifest itself in all the various axes and practices associated with the text, and which would underlie all of the various features of this process, however different in detail and implementation these might be. That *The Night The Prowler* presents such a hall of mirrors,

where characters, author, reader and critic are trapped in the same endlessly repeated drama, is not because power is something that is universally oedipal in its essence, so that whatever the attempted line of escape one always falls back into the bosom of a family. Psychologisation is an effect, not a cause: an effect of the multiplicity of smaller operations and events which work together in ways which do not need the *a priori* guarantees of a constituted subject, a given object for knowledge (the text, the world, human nature) or the community of a shared and relatively transparent language of investigation. Their working is machinic, strategic, a technology which is ultimately one of governmentality (and yet nowhere invokes the State or Capital as its driving force), in a series of functionings, adjustments and articulations with other machineries whose own histories and areas of effectivity are perhaps quite disjunct. Representation is an optical effect, a specular ghost in a perspective space. Its apparent failure to accurately picture a world or a practice is nothing more than its immense flexibility, its ability to implement and make function an entire range of practices beyond any original intentionalities. It functions so well not because it provides a closed system in which everything, even that which is yet to be discovered, already has a place, but because it is infinitely open. It is here, where power is not a structure of repression but something which is always and already at stake and in the process of production, that contestation arises. A contestation which is both Felicity's and—as criticism and the teaching of literature would have us all replay the same drama—ours.

Footnotes

[1] *roland barthes par roland barthes* Editions du Seuil Paris (1975).English edition *Roland Barthes* (trans. Richard Howard) Hill and Wang New York (1977). The handwritten epigraph appears in both editions, although Howard's subscripted translation — "It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel" — loses the directness of the original.

[2] *The Night The Prowler* in Patrick White's *The Cockatoos*, Johnathan Cape, London (1974). Page numbers cited refer to this edition. *The Night The Prowler* is abbreviated in the text as NP.

[3] Three sources which deal with such narrative traps for the commentator in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis and its deconstruction are: 1 The Purloined Letter Debate (Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972) pp38-72; Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth", *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975) pp31-113; Barbara Johnson "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida", *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977) pp457-505; 2 Shoshana

Felman's long discussion of *the Turn of the Screw* ("Turning the Screw of Interpretation", *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977) pp94-207); 3 Don Anderson's reading of a Hawthorne story, "Alice Doane's Appeal" (Deconstructing Alice Doane", *Random Issue* 2 June (1980), pp63-81).

[4] Quoted in Pasquale Pasquino, "Theatrum politicum. The genealogy of capital — police and the state of prosperity", *Ideology and Consciousness" (Autumn l978), pp41-54.*

[5] *My discussion of power draws largely from Michel Foucault's The History of Sexuality. Vol 1: An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley) Vintage Books N.Y. (1980), *Discipline and Punish* (trans. Alan Sheridan) Vintage Books N.Y. (l979) and *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy* (edited by Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton) Feral Publications Sydney (1979).

[6] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies, Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (edited by Josue V. Harari) Methuen London (1980) ppl4l-l60.

[7] ibid. pp158-9

[8] In one form or another, and in a broad sweep which moves from Leavis through the marxist liberalism of Williams to the trotskyism of Eagleton, English criticism has been haunted by the conflict for possession of a canon of texts: the first chapter of Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* (N.L.B. London 1976) for example enacts this drama as a dynasty into which it writes itself as succeeding term. Perhaps the current "Cambridge debate" — a term which makes the sheer fact of sackings seem strangely ethereal — is effecting a displacement of such questions.

[9] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, (trans. Richard Miller, introduction Richard Howard) Hill and Wang N.Y. (1974) pp41-2.

[10] Edward W. Said, *Beginnings, Intention and Method* Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore (l975) p22.

[11] See Part Two, Chapter One of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*.

[12] F.R. Leavis, "Literature and Society" in *The Common Pursuit* Penguin Harmondsworth (1962) pp188-194.

[13] See Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* particularly Part Three, Chapter One: "Docile Bodies".

K.S. Prichard:

The Construction of a Literary Political Subject

Cathy Greenfield and Tom O'Regan

K.S. Prichard: the construction of a literary political subject; this title requires some preliminary remarks, notably, to indicate why we think attention can be usefully focused not on the texts of a novelist or on the novelist, but on the 'criticism' of those novels and on the author that produced them—K.S. Prichard. This paper takes as its point of focus an article of literary and political criticism entitled "K.S. Prichard: Of an End A New Beginning". The article is by Kay Iseman, it appears in *Arena* 54 and it seeks to conduct a re-evaluation of an Australian woman, communist novelist K.S. Prichard. Our paper concerns itself with Iseman's analysis only: this means that its concern with Prichard is limited and extends only as far as Prichard is produced as a textual object in and for Iseman's analysis.

In this context, "the construction of a literary political subject" means the way that Katharine Susannah Prichard (the author best known for her novel *Coonardo)* is characterised as a writer of novels, a feminist and a marxist. We will be looking at the way she and her novels are processed, put into discourse and emerge in critical practice. Also, we will try and give some justification as to why such a narrow focus might be of use to those interested in transforming and giving political readings of literature and its criticism.

To further underline these points: this paper is not concerned with Prichard's novels, or Prichard the person, or even with significant literary theories. It is concerned with something much more narrow, it is concerned to work through a mundane and quite ordinary literary political criticism of the kind Iseman repeats. It does this in order to give a better understanding of how this criticism functions and what it involves.

We do not suggest that the approach we have adopted should be one that is generally undertaken, but we do suggest that occasional and detailed attention to particular texts of literary

criticism is justified, to put into focus rather than to criticise those critical texts and their mechanisms. We are not then advocating that we down tools on the studying and scrutinising of literary texts. However we should on occasion pay attention to those analyses which most of us in one way or another have done and will do. Iseman's article presents itself as an appropriate occasion because of the largesse of its claims to a theoretical foundation of "recent marxist literary criticism" and "to partake of psychoanalytic theory and feminist investigations of culture and consciousness" (Iseman31), and because of its failure to do so— its utter and bereft familiarity. Although we, as writers of this paper, have reservations about the way Prichard is circulated in the literary criticism we are focusing on, we thought it would be far more instructive to focus on the organisation of that literary/political criticism. For Prichard's texts to enjoy a different circulation, a new readership would have to be produced and it is precisely the familiar reading and writing techniques of an Iseman that such a readership would need to avoid.

Thus this paper is an attempt to bring a textual analysis to bear on a critical discourse. We will be working through Iseman's 'analysis' as a discourse, where the term discourse stands for *a systematic ordering of concepts*, and where different discourses are secured or explained by no *general order of Discourse*—such as discourses's reference to a pre-discursive real, or discourse's enactment of invariable and universal psychical rules or deep structures, or discourse's embodiment of the *nature* of language. In other words, discourses are not open to the explanatory, supplementary or critical agency of other discourses through the continuity of a species-genus relation of all discourses to a theory of Discourse. They can just be repeated in their discontinuities. Any continguity of these discontinuous discourses is not of the order of a synthesising consciousness or recognition or an advanced criticism but of a shared repetition of an ordering of concepts. This is what we mean when we state our aim as 'focusing on' rather than *criticising* Iseman's text. By repeating the ordering of concepts in Iseman's discourse we hope that by the end of this article some of the familiar devices in critical practices and their particular effectivity for the circulation of the object texts (i.e. Prichard's texts) are made more visible.

The literary analysis that we are dealing with is one which attempts a political reading of 'Katharine Susannah Prichard'. In Iseman's analysis the whole complex of Prichard— her novels, her life and her political activities — is subjected to scrutiny. Consequently Iseman treats the Prichard 'complex' as so many signs to be deciphered. This process can be very loosely

described, to use Iseman's own critical tools, as a paranoid one. That is, every text or personal event of Prichard's is taken as a symptom of 'Katharine Susannah Prichard's Being'. This underlying reality is what is revealed by her novels, her autobiography, her marriage, her son and so on. It is this which the critic deciphers in lieu of Prichard's own inadequate understanding of herself and her work.

Why is this writing position taken up by Iseman the critic? The reasoning is familiar: Iseman is practicing this literary criticism in order to find out and explore how a woman (Prichard) has or has not coped with her life, politics and art. This is done in order that Iseman (representing us all) as a critic and a woman can come to terms with her own life, politics and critical work. The kind of emphasis involved here is one where the text— 'the Prichard complex'— is taken to be a sympton of the 'Self'. This determines the orientation of analysis— Prichard's texts are read for the way that the relation between politics, literature and self can be answered for a particular person and categories of persons past, present and future.

It should be recognised that Iseman's analysis marks a different approach to literature than that which has traditionally been undertaken by literary critics. More often than not the dialectic between literature and author is answered through a transcendence of self in the practice of literature. The transcendence of personal self is something like the moral imperative of literature. For out of this suspension of self comes literature (where literature means that which is in excess of all its determinant writing and reading techniques and all its institutional placements). The production of literature in this account is no less than a triumph over a flawed personal and mundane existence. Consequently, this 'traditional' criticism can be concerned about how that flaw did or did not enable an author to continually write in an inspired fashion or not. Here the self can only enter via the back door as the object of literature and literary studies. This 'writing self' achieves its transcendence of its mundane existence, as do readers, by the production and appreciation of literature. What is important in this traditional practice is literature, (more precisely the propagation of the institution of literature), since securing it secures the conditions for the self's liberation.

For Iseman, however, literature is an analysable symptom of a social and political self. Consequently in the absence of an adequate political, sexual and social subject, literature can only be the site of *failures* to be overcome in the future. Thus, analysis is prospective rather than retrospective through political and

ideological necessity. For socialism and feminism there is no utopian past, only, at best a future utopia. Here for Iseman, the *flaw* of the character (Prichard) is the productive source of her novels, her activites and so on. Iseman's criticism survives by locating those flaws, although it wishes not to (since those flaws take the critic and Prichard further away from any resolution of them). In this kind of narrative the flaw of character: *"the man in the head"*[1], can either be cured or else the flaw can continue multiplying its effects as it goes along. In this latter case, of which Prichard is an instance, the only cure possible is that done by an outsider in a different political and social context— Iseman. It is to this specific production of Prichard by Iseman that this analysis will now turn.

The remainder of this paper is in three sections. The first section deals with the mechanisms by which Iseman inserts feminism as a theoretical and political practice which can provide an explanation and a reading of Prichard. The second addresses the way that 'Prichard' circulates in Iseman's analysis occupying different positions at different stages in her analysis. The third and concluding section summarises our arguments.

The Use of 'Schools of Thought' and its Connection with Personal and Political Transformation

Iseman claims her article to be mediating and extending the notional fields marxism, psychoanalysis and feminism. Taken separately, these fields are said to be 'poverty-stricken' and in need of supplementation. Without feminism, for example, marxism can neither provide the personal transformation necessary for a subject to act politically, nor can it provide a concomitant account of the constitution of the person. Marxism does not have anything to say about the importance of early childhood experiences on the determination of the self:

> Women, of necessity, define themselves through the contradictory values, attitudes and beliefs of a patriarchal and capitalist culture. But more basic than this consciousness informed by social relations are the unconscious structures which develop from birth within a tight network of family relations and sexual tensions. (Iseman70)

From this quote it is clear that 'woman' as a general category is

the primary concern of the critic's analysis. Feminism is here the discourse which tries to both explain the position of women in culture and offers itself as a program of action— not only so women may come to terms with *the man in the head* but that they may practice alternative relations to power.

Iseman suggests that women should not look principally to immediately recognisable 'determinations of consciousness', but rather to 'unconscious structures' which render ineffectual any 'conscious' or 'real' recognition of capitalist and patriachal culture. Prichard is taken to be a primary instance where this necessity to pay some cognizance to unconscious structuration is needed:

> Prichard, who spent her early years with Jim at Greenmount 'gulping down marxism' with 'small doses of home and health' evaded the fundamental opposition between romantic individualism and scientific socialism. Her rational belief in Marxism remained encased in the deeper structures of bourgeois culture. (Iseman88)

Iseman delivers these words with a warning to women: as much as women may agitate in the political sphere or theorise such relations, their sexual preferences and personal lives may involve a direct undermining of that agitation or theorisation:

> In terms of Katherine Susannah Prichard's life and writings, her real social relations to Australian bourgeois culture could not be obliterated by her conscious and rational commitment to marxist political beliefs. She may have been aware of class divisions, determined by economic practice within capitalism, but she never reflected on sexual divisions, or the degree to which they reflect property relations, although she was painfully locked within them.
>
> (Iseman85)

For Iseman the ultimate connection between the public Prichard and her personal life is the assumption that political engagement is always overridden and measurable according to the purposes of one's moral and individual improvement and experience. Thus it can be said that Prichard, by investing her energy into the communist party, into pamphleteering, into disciplining her art to the objectives of the party, directed herself away from attention to personal relationships.

Prichard's lack of attention to 'the personal' and to

unconscious value systems incarcerated her into the stranglehold of male values which she then, according to Iseman, represented and expressed:

> If she could not face the possibility that there might be an inherent weakness in the men who dominated her life, nor survive feeling personally responsible for her complicity in their fatal actions, she could find logical explanations for suffering and social injustice in marxist theory. (Iseman90)

Prichard's 'fatal flaw' is further related to her advocacy of the hard line Stalinist direction the communist party took in the 1930's and 40's. Prichard, a high ranking party official, places her faith in Stalin after her husband's death. Her investment in Stalinism stands as a part explanation for the strategies and alignments of the Australian Communist party in the thirties. Her biography is assumed to be the site at which cultural penetration is most witnessed. For Iseman, to read an individual's life is to read the history of social movements, and vice versa: "After Hugo's death Katharine placed her faith in Stalin. Personal and political identity became fused within the party." (Iseman92) In Iseman's text, it is as if Prichard's endorsement of Stalin can be explained by positing that she (and others) had an underlying 'need' for substitutive father figures.

In Iseman's analysis, the political, its theorisation: marxism— and a potentially un-motivated psychoanalysis are ranked below feminism. Feminism is the principle means of explaining Prichard. Although below the threshold of adequacy, these other schools of thought are retained as having the value of half truths or incomplete explanation:"Prichard was not alone in her response to this dilemma. Marxist writers and critics alike have been slow to recognise the dual constraints of both class and sex on individual lives and social processes." (Iseman96.)However, marxism and psychoanalysis are seen to be adequate up to a point. Instead of a criticism of the particular entity marxism, there is an explicit ranking and mapping of each particular school of thought. This means that marxism, for instance, is taken to be able to explain one particular range of phenomena, and then for another set of phenomena psychoanalysis can be used, and then for another feminism will take over. It is in this way that Iseman promises a total picture.

When Iseman asks: "Given the intensely tragic nature of her relationships with those closest to her, how did she cope?" (Iseman89) she is constructing and simultaneously affirming the

necessity of taking the biographical subject as her point of focus. In posing this question she indicates the necessity of ranking social relationships in reference, finally, to personal trajectory. This functions as the methodological guarantor of any writing which affirms its liberatory nature through its own mediation of apparently fixed institutional locations:

> These contradictions, inherent in her fiction from *The Pioneers* to *Winged Seeds*, are rooted deep within Katharine Susannah Prichard's unconscious as a result of early childhood experiences within the family. They underscore the nature of her subjective attachment to male values and attitudes within bourgeois and, more importantly, patriarchal culture.(Iseman96)

In this quote, the critic not only asks, how Prichard coped, but she is already asking it of her readers, who are presumably to participate in the posing of the existential question: 'How does one survive one's life?'.

In Iseman's text feminism provides the most legitimate means of analysis and intervention. It does so because psychic productions, the experience of sexuality *and* more particularly, gender specificity, are seen as ultimate societal determinants. Social relations and economic determinations are epiphenomena to these levels. And the discourse which privileges them (marxism) is secondary. Marxism's use is as an aid for understanding and transforming details. The implications of Iseman's feminist analysis here is that although a 'conscious subject' is said to be replaced with a "decentred subject"[2], we can see that the acting and becoming subject (i.e. the biographical chart of Prichard's life) remains the principle means of political intervention and criteria for understanding. We may say that the 'decentring' is retained only with regard to Prichard conceived as a unitary conscious subject. Such a decentring is the bifurcation of Prichard into a subject with a conscious and unconscious which in Iseman's analysis locates Prichard as determined and self determined. Further, the critic in contradistinction to the author brings this unconscious into consciousness.

It is through these techniques that Iseman makes fully conscious or present what was previously obscured (the unconscious is thereby erased). This movement of writing is done through the capabilities of theorist as a subject. Understanding Prichard involves responding warmly, sensitively, admonishingly and it is to be familiar with the texts

and the lost/deceased personality of Prichard, Iseman responds *sensitively:*

> Given the intensely tragic nature of her relationships with those closest to her. How did she cope?(Iseman89)

also *admonishingly:*

> But one cannot survive personal recriminations of this magnitude. They are destructive and ultimately futile.(Iseman90)

understanding Prichard means responding *familiarly*:

> Katharine's renewed vigour for political action knew no bounds... (Iseman91)

and *disapprovingly*:

> Prichard continually involved herself with masterful men. (Iseman85)

as if speaking to a child:

> But in youth, mother was the rival for father's attention; the moral censor who attempted to check Katie's heady rein. (Iseman73)

and with awe:

> ...in 1907, she met the Australian socialist Dr. Rudolf Broda, who introduced her to socialism. As she consumed volumes of anti-christian texts she read radical political ones as well. While in London, she investigated Guild Socialism, Syndicalism, philosophical anarchism, Rostrucianism, theosophy, Cowley's mysticism, Hinduism, Buddhism...the list is incredible. (Iseman91)

In creating the simulacrum of Prichard's life, the critic/theorist is also created as understanding accomplice.

Just as understanding Prichard involved the gamut of the personal emotions of the critic, so too we find that coming to terms with a theory or text is the activity of the same subject. The

location of fields such as marxism, psychoanalysis and feminism map out a milieu in which the theorist circulates. These fields are what she can move between. They are what she can use. But when these fields are used aren't they merely notional terms with some kind of taxonomic value? They have no intrinsic or referential status other than that provided in the place they appear: this writing.

We can see in the beginning of *Arena* 54 the construction and ordering of discourses such as structuralism, phenomenology, semiotics and functionalism. In John Sinclair's "BIG M: The Analysis of Consumer Manipulation" these discourses are presented is seems in order to position a theorising subject who ideally mediates them, making them in the process, 'fixed locations':

> It (the text reviewed) does indeed provide a fine opportunity to 'get into' structuralism and semiology as derived from Althusser, Barthes, Lacan and Levi-Strauss, but the concern here is to show the limits and vulnerabilities of what kind of intellectual fashion one might be getting into... She (Judith Williamson: "Decoding Advertisements": the text being reviewed) understands the problem of subjective inscription to be social and historical, she addresses it only in terms of the synchronic, universal and psychoanalytic theory of Lacan. While there is a need to explain the working of ideology at the subjective level. One may fear that too exclusive an emphasis at this level may lead to a phenomenological wasteland, in which social structure is either ignored or relegated to certain functionalist assumptions.(Sinclair6-7 our insertion)

In the passage above a taxonomy of apparently fixed discourses is manifested. Thus we get a notion of a reasoned and therefore reasonable discussion of these discourses. But this lack of engagement in their actual language practices of the discourses named above seems to be the condition under which *Arena* conducts its discussion of foreign texts.

Just as the experiences of Prichard *qua* subject are presented, so

too for an emerging feminism the experience of negotiating Prichard (with an end to intervention in her experience) is built on the ashes of Prichard's persona and work. Iseman's intervention will make 'of an end a new beginning'. So both Prichard and the critic Iseman seem to face similar dilemmas—similar problems. There are differences of course. For example, Prichard's sexual preferences for males functions as an inhibition that Iseman chastises her for by calling her at that moment Prichard rather than *Katharine, Katie, Katharine Susannah,* or *Katharine Susannah Prichard*.

There are two operations involved here. The first operation is the projection of the experience of Prichard— the description of the unconscious— her sexual frustrations etc. Secondly, there is the experience of the analyst which is thought alternatively as the result of and as the origin for the analysis. Thus there are two possible scenes for these experiences to take place in: (a) the personal lives of both Prichard and the theorist, and (b) that of the political-theoretical positions that were held. For example Iseman cites Prichard's theory of sexuality where women are given as passive and weak alongside events and experiences charted in Prichard's biography:

> Prichard's 'feminism' upheld the concept that it is women's moral duty to keep a check on society as an extension of the family. When she heard the view...that 'marriage is a bargain in which a woman sells out all sexual rights in herself', she left the club whose views were too feminist and anarchistic. Curiously Prichard has Jerome Hartog, Elodie's lover in *Intimate Strangers*, express these same views, which may indicate a change in attitude as a result of the problems encountered in her own marriage.(Iseman77)

Prichard's theoretical standpoint and view of women is then expressed in her personal life and vice versa. So what we get established here is the mutual reinforcement or calculation from one realm (theory/politics) to another (biography, life experience) and back again.

In Iseman's text, a rectification of the subject (Prichard) becomes synonomous with a rectification of theory (marxism and psychoanalysis). A subject, Prichard, is fractured into a variety of functions (woman, communist, lover). To reconcile these functions is the same as resolving the gulf between marxism and psychoanalysis, or the gap between the personal and the political, between the public and the private.

For Iseman, the connection between theoretical fields and self-mediating social relations is secured by a process of interchanging and exchanging one against the other. This is manifestly incoherent at least from a logical point of view but it is nevertheless how that language practice which says 'the personal is political' works. To start from a subject, Prichard, who failed to mediate, to unify or come to terms with these functions except in a substitutive way, is to start from the provocation of marxism, psychoanalysis and feminism. For Iseman the resolution and connection between these fields must ultimately be drawn from a feminist practice. What unites the two projects of unifying a fractured self and unifying a fragmented theory is the production of an ideal subject, an ideal person. The unification of a fractured self is achieved by the 'working through' of a self (Prichard and at times Iseman) according to personal relations: the way the figures of love, sex and death penetrate her writing. Whilst the unifying of theory involves the unification of those areas of theorising which deal with the putting of subjects into social existence. Having done that, a coherent interventionist strategy can be worked out that accords with the necessity of a unified project and subject across the sites: psychoanalysis, marxism and feminism. It is clear from this that the project of constructing a unified/ideal subject is of strategic importance in Iseman's analysis. In the next section we will deal with the circulation of Prichard as an 'object' in the Iseman text.

The Circulation of Prichard as Object for Analysis

> But Tom dies in an industrial accident before we have a chance to see if it is possible for Prichard to create a male character who can fulfil the roles of worker, husband and father.(Iseman93)

What does this remark about a novel mean? According to Iseman, Prichard cannot create in her novels a male character who is capable of unifying and adequately living out the various social functions men are seen to have: worker, father and husband. Why is this so? The answer given earlier is that she cannot because of the constraints of ideology. Prichard then is a true indicator of ideology at this point. However the men that she did have relationships with were 'masterful' (V.C. heroes, police commissioners, doctors and sea captains). Prichard's ideology in her books is the indicator of her unconscious and unresolved

conflicts— not just for her but for women in general:

> Ideological constraints within the male hegemony determined her life as well as the very structure of her unconscious. They explain her deeply ambivalent attitudes toward female sexuality which pervade her novels from *The Pioneers* to *Winged Seeds*. These are the gaps, the silences, the things unspoken in her work through which we can detect the limits of ideology.(Iseman85)

Iseman, as critic, 'makes good' these conflicts by demonstrating the extent to which Prichard manifests them. The writer Prichard shows them, the critic Iseman spells them out. The division of labour entailed here is one which really aportions responsibility to each party: the critic and the author. It indicates their possible mediation in a mutual sensitivity. But Prichard's consciousness and her political activities sprang out of these conflicts too! So it seems that the principle of scientific socialism can directly produce a whole experience: since it is there it has its origins. This leads to the following circularity. Prichard cannot have that experience or liberatory trajectory because she cannot overcome ideology here (that entailed in sexuality and interpersonal relations). She cannot overcome ideology because she has not got the right consciousness (marxist-feminist), she has not got the right consciousness because she has had the wrong experiences (e.g. those resulting from investing her sexual energies in men). Then finally to return to where we started, she has not got the right experiences because of the ideology she retains. This is a perfectly circular and self perpetuating line of argumentation: it construes Prichard as simultaneously determined and self-determining:

> But if her life experiences, and those so convincingly portrayed in her novels, are any guide, the physical attractions of love did not fall under the Marxist gambit. She consigned the psychologically complex dimensions of sexuality to the realm of primitive instincts. She renounced Freudian theory and denied the influence of Lawrence on her work, but her public pronouncements may have disguised private doubts. Throughout her life there remains a basic contradiction between her romantic and passionate temperament and the rational and scientific commitment of the political realist. The dichotomy is

> no-where more obvious than in her love affair with Hugo Throssell, the dashing young V.C. hero from Perth.(Iseman83)

On the one hand Prichard's life is given as a failure: her private doubts could not find a way into her consciousness because they could not be appropriated and expanded in her own life and work. Such an expansion of her writing and subjective capacities would have ultimately led her to the feminism of today: i.e. the critic's position. On the other hand, the author's life is also given as a failure because: "that novel, and the tragedy of Hugo's suicide which sundered her art and life, reneges on its critique of the institution of bourgeois marriage in its final (altered) ending of renewed domestic harmony."(Iseman77)Prichard reneges on the critique of bourgeois marriage she had begun with. It was not as if she did not have such a critique, as the former figure of failure specifies, she did— she simply did not go through with it. Thus Prichard is not a fully determined but rather a mutable subject here. Through actions such as the alteration of a novel's ending— a response to a personal tragedy— Prichard's 'failure' is cemented in place: "The breakthrough to an understanding of the connections between personal and social life is blocked by Hugo's death and Katherine's irrepressible guilt".(Iseman79)

In Iseman's text, Prichard's action is (a) part of a developing logic giving her personal history a definite form, (b) an effect of historical determination, the limits of the ideology of the time, and (c) determined by her unconcious which appears to be the scene for the unification of historical (or societal) determination and personal history:

> We begin to see just how complex the problem of 'the man in the head' can become. If Prichard was a product of family relationships, she and her family were also a product of their culture. This fiercely independent woman, who would not allow the constraints of a society to limit her achievements, who shook her fist at life and dealt effectively with every contingency and laughed at life's cruel fate, still allowed herself to marry and be dominated in that relationship by a (false) male ideal. (Iseman85)

Prichard could have been different if— (a) the scientific train of thought gained from marxism had been focused on the self and (b) if there were emotions, physical desires and relations capable of producing a change of consciousness that would enable a

breaking of the veil of the unconscious (that is, if she had not allowed herself to marry and be dominated by false male ideals).

On the other hand, Prichard could *not* have been different because— (a) she was an historical actor subject to the normative values of her time and (b) her relationships with others were determined by the historical juncture— such that what it was possible for her to experience was tied up with the state of knowledge at the time:"Her conscious commitment to a marxist ideology is apparent; but the unconscious structures informed by family life and bourgeois culture underlie the ambiguous conclusion."(Iseman94) The rather ambiguous conclusion we are left with by Iseman is that in Katharine Susannah Prichard's time there was no developed feminism, and psychoanalysis had not attained any widespread circulation.

Prichard could have been different if there was a fully developed feminist movement that had a theory and practice capable of transforming her and thus her writing. Iseman's analysis is anachronistic here, for the criteria by which past texts or personas are judged are always those formed in later discourses. The problem here is that Iseman's analysis must assume that we can know *now* (with the benefit of hindsight and progressive feminist/marxist and psychoanalytic theory) the underlying truth of Prichard's experiences and novels. To make this claim privileges Iseman's own analytic practices and sensibility. However there can be no argument which guarantees her arguments and claims here. To hold to her position means that a series of tautological and circular claims must be employed. Iseman writes:"In this final scene from *Working Bullocks* one can detect an unconscious identification of Prichard with her mother and a projection of the tragedy of her marriage scripted already without her conscious knowledge."(Iseman88) What are we to make of her claims? Prichard writes a scene in a novel, that writing 'causes' the personal tragedy? Iseman's addendum to this is that if Prichard were able to utilise concepts of unconscious identification, or able to become aware of such identifications, she could have changed her life. She did not. Iseman's anachronistic discourse here necessarily sites the object (Prichard and her writings) as 'expressive' of whatever conceptualisations are employed in the critical discourse itself. Pritchard's texts are not formed by anything else but the practices Iseman employs and performs on them. Locating Prichard's texts as *'expressive'* enables Iseman's critical claim to have penetrated to the generative site of Prichard's textual and personal productions, such that other accounts or existences are epiphenomena to it.

This generativity which Iseman claims to locate is theorised as power. It is to the power of Prichard in and of herself, the power of her sexual, emotional, social and political relationships and the power of her creative texts on which analysis in focused. Iseman goes about locating, appreciating and conserving Prichard's power for utilisation in current political and social interventions. In Iseman, Prichard's power recurrs and snowballs at a number of different junctures. For example, we get an evocation of the power of Prichard's novels:

> In her novels the interplay of sex, love and death which constitute their power and through which the contradictions with ideology can be discovered. (Iseman73)

We get reference to the power Prichard has over others:

> Her early experience with N'gardo suggests that she possessed not only a magnetism, but an ability to profoundly affect even the most commanding of characters.(Iseman80)

She attracts power and is irresistably attracted to it:

> Prichard consistently involved herself in relationships with masterful men. Sailors, politicians, war heroes, men on horseback, men in uniform— all hold an impulsive attraction. She could successfully compete, both sexually and professionally, with all of them. But she unconsciously acceded to their power.(Iseman85)

Although acceding to male power, her intrinsic power is seen as of such magnitude that it cannot be repressed for too long:

> And she detested weakness...Katharine's father was the first of a series of men in her life who both attracted her in their dominance and disappointed her in their defeat.(Iseman85)

The power of relationships she experienced is expressed in her novels:

> *The Pioneers*, written during her three year trip abroad, reveals sexual and power politics within marriage to the critical reader. But there is no

> awareness of the author's consciousness of this dimension. (Iseman77)

The extent of her political involvements is given as an exemplification of her superior energies:

> Faithfull to the stalinist line to the day of her death, she marched, spoke at meetings, formed clubs, travelled across country, demonstrated, leafletted, faced riots, arrests and political persecution with unflagging tenacity. Writing had to yield to political exigencies. (Iseman91-2)

and is questioned as a misdirection of those self-same energies:

> Undoubtedly sincere in her political commitment, there still remains an obsessional quality in her involvement with the Communist party after Hugo's death which might be understood in part as a defence against both anger and guilt.(Iseman90)

> If it (Hugo's death) sapped the creative power of her artistry, it also prompted a redirection of her incredible energies. (Iseman89)

But this negative displacement of energies is given also as historically and politically fortuitous:

> After Hugo's suicide, Katharine's renewed vigour for political action knew no bounds. Much of this activity was unavoidable, given the political and economic crises of the decade. Prichard had established the communist party in Western Australia in 1919. (Iseman91)

Her power and integrity is asserted despite (or is it because of) life's vicissitudes and mistakes:

> In fact, Prichard met every one of life's defeats with renewed convictions— both artistic and political. (Iseman89)

Power then is what Prichard is seen to possess. It is the dynamic core that maintains and preserves her interest in life, art and politics despite their vicissitudes. As such it functions as the

means for the reproduction of these spheres. But *power* is also something that is a means, a potential capacity which may or may not be utilised for political or personally constructive purposes in different spheres.

Any redirection of her incredible energies from one sphere to another— from art to politics— is more the effect of subjective orientation or historical necessity than any internal necessity these political and artistic spheres could represent in themselves: *'writing had to yield to political exigency'*. *Power*, as another name for the subject Prichard, lends itself to these different spheres. Sometimes it supports their reproduction, in other places it is simply applied. There is no necessity build into Prichard's activities or functions that is not ultimately dependant on the operation and logic of Prichard herself. Correspondingly, there can be no conception of artistic or societal practices and articulations outside that provided by the subject (Prichard) and the subjective orientation necessary to sustain them.

The *power* of Prichard's work is established with an identical moment in her life: (e.g. the intensity of her marriage). There is no dislocation possible here: what Prichard is, what she is most capable of, is what determines in direct fashion her creative works. The construction of Prichard's *power* then, is motored by a pendulous economy. Her creative texts must be organised in similar fashion as her life to render the multiplicity of Prichard's *power* possible. This organisation functions to allow analysis to shift between levels with a semblance of coherence.

Power is a theme running through diverse levels of life and art, but it is treated as more than just a theme. It becomes a means to explain and connect these levels. Prichard's *power* is that which, by its excess, escapes the regressive male hegemony she unconsciously acceded to— yet it also trapped her in that hegemony. But the "excess", which is something more than just Prichard as social and historical actor, is what is constituted as a possible 'beginning' for Iseman. Prichard's sheer activity is ultimately what the literary/political critic contemplates. For this theme of Prichard's *power* is what prefigures and preserves the legitimacy of feminist personal and political orientations. That 'magnetism' and 'incredible' energy are wondered at in order to recuperate the subject who produced ideologically incorrect novels. For Prichard possesses the *power* (a gender-specific power?) incredible magnetism and strength of will that critical and aesthetic practices of today need to resume their mandate. Those needs are partially fulfilled through the critic doing an 'active' rather than a 'passive' reading of Prichard's texts and autobiography.

Although the figure of 'failure' (due to political activism) in Prichard's writing is maintained it is not the endpoint of analysis. The reason for this is that effectivity is no longer invested in literature itself, rather literature gains its orientation via the subject who not only produces books and leaflets but founds parties, gets married and faces riots. This so-called 'departure' enables Iseman to see the figure of Prichard as no less interesting because she allowed her rational marxist beliefs to intrude on her artistry. Indeed the problem with Prichard (her life and art) is that she did not allow the rational feminist psychoanalytic to intrude enough. For Iseman this would have counted as a resolution of the celebrated dilemma between political commitment and aesthetic demands. Artistry and politics are ranked below the underlying structure and consequent effectivity of a 'woman' subject. In Iseman's text acknowledgement of feminism counts as resolving the conflicting social demands of art and politics and is equivalent to curing Prichard. A correct orientation and self appraisal of the producing subject— from romantic individualist to rational worker (affirming women and politics)—would necessarily be the criteria for the production of more significant artistic and political practices than Prichard's.

The personal, the political and the artistic are seen as just so many sites or spheres in which women can engage. In themselves they are not open to evaluation. Perhaps Iseman will not adopt social realism as the preferred vehicle of artistic production but she still must retain a relation of expression for both her analysis and artistic production to be carried out. The realist position of commentary is maintained.

The subjectivity of the author Prichard, as another name for the site of literary and social production, is given in excess. Prichard is the figure that expresses herself through power and therefore is what is to be wondered at and appreciated. She is also the concrete expression, the text, that needs analysis to render the 'subject' Prichard explicable: the 'powerful' needs to be in a presentable form for feminism.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, here is a general description of the familiar textual strategy for the various constitutions of objects in the Iseman text. The following list of procedures and strategies is by no means final comment, rather, it is designed to reiterate some of the features of this kind of literary criticism.

The critic established the necessity of her practice by presenting the objects of analysis in terms of what they *lack*. That is their function is relative to their success or failure to embody an ideal. In Iseman the ideal is a marxist-feminist text. Such a text would be able to take full cognizance of the effect of ideology in all its locations, account for its own mode of production and give an adequate and liberatory account of ideology. This is what the Prichard texts fail to do. It is this *lack* that will be made good for the reader by the analysis:

> In the gaps, in what remains unspoken, the reader can detect the limits of ideology that the writer was unable to articulate. As critics, we must discover the gaps in the work— its incompleteness, the presence of conflict at its borders. For there are corresponding conflicts at the borders of the author's consciousness as well. Such a 'symptomatic' reading of the signs within the text can reveal the relationship of the text and its author, to the age and its ideology.(Iseman71)

The textual instrument that the critic uses to rectify the *lack* in the novels is the writer's autobiography. The autobiographical form is used unproblematically as giving immediate access to the author. The writer Prichard, the woman Prichard is constrained to appear almost as if a full flesh and blood subject in the text she writes. Her life or psyche emerges in the texts under review. The 'author-presence' is a device through which the multiple experiences that are given as representing/expressing the writer's social relations can be marshalled into a single productive force.

> ...there remains a constant and unchanging pattern in the fundamental structure of every novel...which is symptomatic of Prichard's unconscious...(Iseman72)

The author is constructed according to a typology of stories that establish the existence of a creative persona specific to authors— which functions to mark their difference from readers or critics. This difference can then be exploited as the site of the critic's intervention and supplementation of the author for the reader. These stories give the author's style or creativity as the product of a capacity to feel and experience more than others. But this is a capacity with a depicted limitation: such expressions may not be at the service of rational or political ends. An author's capacity to feel and experience is revealed and deduced by a flaw

or circumstance in his/her life that has the two-fold function of obstacle and spur. The author, in order to be an author, has to have a persistence and a wayward talent to overcome what normal mortals would succumb to. There are several variations of the way the flaw can be constructed: being poor, being physically afflicted, being Jewish in America. For Prichard it is being a woman.

> Is there not in this a rewriting of Katharine's sexual script? Gina's physical handicap (being a woman) and her life's trials are no match for her indomitable will. (Iseman79)

It is against this handicap that Prichard's style and creativity (in both writing, politics and personal life) emerge, and it is to the extent to which she overcomes and fails to overcome this handicap that provides the measure by which a critic alternately praises and damns her. The source of the author's capability is given experientially and existentially: *it is always a private 'wonder' or a 'unique' set of circumstances that prove endlessly fertile for investigation*. This major workforce of speculation is supported by the practice of assuming fictional characters as surrogate figures for the conflicts in the life of the author. A network of reverberations appears to be thereby set up which is plumbed as the characters in the novels are called in to establish the capability of the author to create those characters and vice versa. The critic, in an avowed ranking of text, reads autobiography as the privileged mode of entry into, and explanation of, the fictional texts.

The critic 'makes good' the gaps in the fictional text by being able to represent/theorise the process by which the Author came to effect the novels. This functions as the mode of literary production for Iseman. The critic's capacity consists in the ability to theorise it: to represent what these non-critical texts can only manifest.

But these non-critical texts manifest— as absences— the unresolved conflicts in the author's life. So, Prichard's ideologically constrained relationships with men, along with her 'real' social relations to Australian bourgeois culture could not be obliterated by her conscious and rational commitment to marxist beliefs. This resulted in an 'unresolved dissonance' in her. This meant that she was never able to create a male character to match the strong female characters of her novels.

The unresolved conflicts, the enduring 'signifying' experiences, are seen as manifestations of the ideology

constraining the author. The extent to which ideology is not overcome in the author's life is the extent to which the novels remain effects of that ideology. This is how their interest and significance are given— as effects of an ideology which will help us in the present to know more of that ideology in order that we can 'obliterate it with our conscious and rational commitments'.

But ideology is only given to us as it is experienced by the author. It is an equivalent formulation to the biographical one that sees texts as the effects of the traces of the author's experiences. Prichard's texts are read simultaneously as effects of ideology and effects of the author. As the author has been set up as an existential, individual and non-ideological concept— Prichard may be a 'woman in ideology', but the concept of author is not considered as an ideological construct— a division between a false and an embryonic true consciousness must be maintained.

The full evocation of the author/Prichard and her possibilities is the objective of Iseman's analysis. Once false ideology is expunged, what will be left will be the conditions under which *'the ideal'* (marxism-feminism) can flourish. We may thus talk of *an excess of the body*— a remainder of subjectivity and therefore a capacity which Prichard is deemed to have which the ideology (or description) cannot totally inscribe. This remainder, by not being able to be inscribed, provides this analysis with its justification and orientation.

Footnotes

[1] Iseman explains the notion of "the man-in-the-head" and notes it is a central issue for feminist theory: "How to deal with "the man in the head" is a problem familiar to contemporary feminists". The problem is that: "Women of necessity define themselves through the contradictory values, attitudes and beliefs of a patriarchal and capitalistic culture. But more basic than this consciousness informed by social relations are the unconscious structures which develop from birth within a tight network of family relationships and sexual tensions".Kay Iseman, "Of an End A New Beginning" *Arena* 54 p70

[2] Iseman's concept of de-centring is spelled out as follows: "The text, however, contains gaps and silences; it is incomplete and de-centred. In the gaps, in what remains unspoken, the reader can detect the limits of ideology that the writer was unable to articulate. As critics, we must discover the gaps in the work — its incompleteness, the presence of conflicts at its borders. For there are corresponding conflicts at the borders of the author's consciousness as well". Kay Iseman, "Of an End A New Beginning" *Arena* 54 p71.

Aspects of Contemporary Australian Poetry

John Forbes

The aspects of Australian poetry I want to talk about are mainly social ones because I think that the institution of poetry and its place in Australia determines at least the grounds on which whatever is distinctive about Australian poetry, if anything, develops.

To begin this I'd question the worth of discussing poetry at all. Why bother with it? There are two common approaches taken by those who do discuss "Poetry" in the abstract; the first is that of the social reformer, whose approach varies from demands for its immediate abolition to the earnest John Cleese in glasses type who wants poetry to change or be changed in some way—usually in line with some theory of literary reflection— so that it will be more "Australian" or more "modern" or less elitist. The second is the cultural booster— either arts bureaucrat/academic or "hippie". Both think that Poetry is a good thing, one because he or she draws a salary to think so, the other because he thinks writing poetry is a better activity than bulldozing rainforest or watching TV. Very few of the above have opinions on other part-time activities; none of them, for instance, spill ink calling for the abolition of model aeroplane making; a few of them might want to reform greyhound racing or bushwalking, but they don't write articles about it. During the Philosophy Department strike at Sydney University a few years ago, the people on strike set up an alternative unpaid department offering a wide range of courses— too wide as far as one member of the English Department was concerned. I remember him telling me that, while he too was on strike in sympathy with the cause, he couldn't support an alternative department that offered a course in tap dancing because (and I quote) "that's not what a university is for". Needless to say, he would never have questioned the right of poetry— but no tap dancing.

I'm telling this story because it stands for that whole tradition from Mathew Arnold to Terry Eagleton who see poetry as *the*

focus of values, even though they know that poetry and "Literature" generally had only become important as sources of value since the beginning of mass-literacy. Even knowing that "Literature" has in a diffused, secular way, the same function the Bible once had, they still believe that it can renounce this purpose and redeem itself, through some change in its style or content. This belief is shared by many Australian poets. It is a flattering belief for writers of poetry. And while I may sound dubious about it, many of the poets who adopt it lay claim to such nobility of spirit that anyone would hesitate to call them cynical or self serving— consider for instance Robert Gray's manifesto in the latest *"Meanjin"*:

> The best poetry is about human values, as much as about literary values. Rilke says it is the poet's business to praise— it is such values that one praises...I believe with Pound that 'only emotion endures'; in fact, I think it's the quality of the emotion that most distinguishes a poem. I'd say my critical position is basically Poundian; I begin with his fairly well-known technical strictures and standards— still the best— and share his scorn for l'art pour l'art. But when it comes to the content, of course, I completely disagree....[1]

As an explanation of a hobby this is absurd. But even those who make no moral claims for the practice of poetry still assume that it is central to human affairs. For example, in his introduction to *The New Australian Poetry* John Tranter states:

> The poets of the Generation of '68 have left the duties of priest, psycho-therapist and moral administrator to those who feel they are best trained to enact them. They have instead devoted their energies to that field of human action where their skills and talents arm them with a unique authority, where meaning embodies itself as speech, and words emerge as that most ancient yet most contemporary voyage of discovery, literature.[2]

Despite the many paraphrases that poetry sheds here, its centrality is described in almost platonic terms, "part of a wider

freedom". John Tranter wants to dispense with poetry as a sort of secular tabernacle but under the rubric of "modernism" he retains poetry as follows:

> ...poetry was worth a serious effort of commitment. It was not seen as a pastime, nor as a hobby; it was not a pleasant diversion from an academic routine, nor a skill to be developed for its own sake. It was generally seen as an integral part of a wider freedom: freedom from conscription (we were at war with North Vietnam at the time), freedom from censorship and police harassment, freedom to experiment with drugs, to develop a sexual ethic liberated from authoritarian restraints, and freedom from the handcuffs of rhyme and the critical strictures of the university English departments.[3]

All of which is fair enough, although it implies again that "Literature" exists on a planet of its own. Also there is the assumption that a writer of poems has some better reason for doing what he does, than anyone else has for doing what they do. Unlike those who see writing as a moral activity he is not the victim of self-delusion in this respect but he does see the poet as professional. This seems less than obvious to me although there is a way in Australia today that a poet can live by 'being a poet' but not by writing poems; at least what he or she must do is be seen to be writing, by publishing books and poems in magazines and by doing what I'm doing now; the nature or quality of what's written is not that important at all. Professionalism in Australian poetry is a question of roles: the two roles available that pay are the poet-as-crazy or the poet-as-professor/professional. There are some cross-overs and some combinations, and some who play the two roles off against each other. Michael Wilding for instance, who subsists on his academic post, can also lay claim, justifiably, to a degree of literary craziness, each role excusing and sustaining the other. And I'm not accusing him of "bad faith" in this respect, merely of being a conspicuous local example of how the role is rewarded, not the writing. Alternately, one can be interesting. In fact, it's necessary to be "interesting" in the media sense of the word (especially in the role of poet-as-crazy) in order to attract the attention of the people who give out the grants. Writing *per se* is merely evidence.

Another recent example of this style of literary role playing is Peter Kocan, a poet who was formerly in a lunatic asylum for

some years, after taking a shot at Arthur Calwell. Mr. Kocan writes poems, often rhyming, often in stanzas; but when I heard him interviewed by Caroline Jones a few months ago they weren't discussing metrics; about the same time he got a $15,000 grant for poetry. An example of the professionalism of the Poet-as-professor is Dorothy Hewett. She is besides a poet, a playwright, a novelist, an ex-Marxist, an ex-academic and a feminist. She has in the last few years attracted any number of jobs as a writer-in-residence at Universities and C.A.E.'s; not so much on account of her poetry but because of the many hats she can quite legitimately wear. So good luck to her, part of my reason for being here is to add this conference to my curriculum vitae. By such means does the "professional" poet exist in Australia. And existing this way the writer runs the risk of becoming completely a function of the social rituals that enclose the way that he or she earns their living. I say "run the risk" but many Australian writers are oblivious to this or actively want to become ideological totem poles; a prospect that seduces us all, not just Les Murray.

However my saying this is a function of what I'm outlining. Being here reading a paper on a topic as amorphous as "Aspect of Contemporary Australian Poetry" reinforces a ritual function of the Poet. The poet comes into the academy, bites the hand that feeds him and the hand is duely gratified and/or annoyed and everything goes on as before. This function of the poet is a social equivalent of the idea of poetry that sees the poem as pointing out what the dominant rhetoric would miss or ignore. In this view, although it's not articulated in this way, poetry represents hidden or overlooked values; the poem has a role similar to Henry Fonda's in the movie *"Twelve Just Men"*, or, alternatively, it is the pause that refreshes. But whether you are pro-life or pro-fun, the poem has a similar function and, socially, so does the poet. That's why I was going into details about how "professionalism" in Australian poetry depends almost entirely on the role poets and poetry plays. It has very little do do with what Derrida calls the *"disruption"* and *"aphoristic energy"* of writing.

Knowing this situation for what it is and my role within it doesn't change anything; as if it were some sort of oppressive, remote control which I could, with an appropriate amount of "sincerity" or whatever, disconnect from my own actions. Any attempt to do that is negated by the fact that I'm continuing: if they'd let me in on my own terms I'd take my place in this system quick smart. It's not something I can apologise for to any purpose. It's horrible to act "sincerely" but its even worse to find that only by "highmindedness" or irony can you avoid knowing that you are rewarded 'as a poet' on how well you can manipulate

or fulfill people's expectations of your role— and I don't know any Australian poets who could deny totally that they could be described as such by, for instance, the committee that designed the Literature Board application forms. Most poets react to this situation by developing a public act and a belief that the role of "poet" itself will somehow save them from the consequences of responding to what people assume they are. How wrong this is shows up in the work of the poet-as-crazy and the poet-as-professor, once they are established in their respective roles. Their work becomes a cypher showing their status in relation to "Literature". And their work gets worse as they get older. It becomes more and more just a response to that image of themselves which they have joined with their audience in consuming. The poet writes poems which, along with the role ascribed to doing this, then creates the Poet, capital "P" as a function of Literature, capital "L". The poems created out of this situation use a language that has ceased to imply its own contradictions and instability— "meaning" becomes solidified and the cracks the original poems papered over get filled with the spakfilla of Literary Identity and another "individual style" appears on the "scene". The dilemmas of this situation produced the following, which, as a theory of writing, confronts or rather, sidles up to, its status as Literature by being entitled "*Ars Poetica*" and having an epigraph from the Ramones: "I wonna be sedated". It begins:

> Raving against the space
> where the poem sounds
> like a revolving door that
> makes the noise a car makes
> bumping into the dole—
> that's the target. And don't
> forget President Kennedy
> travelling on the S.S. France
> things are more like
> they are now than they have
> ever been before,
> clear somehow, like
> physical fitness. You
> celebrate your indifference
> with a packet of lollies
> or a Ton-Ton Macoute
> haircut. It's almost
> pure debauchery, as prayer
> is for example: your heart
> is full of hatreds more

intricate than fractures
in shatter-proof glass.
Put a brick through
a real-estate agent's window
and it bounces back
and cuts you. That's what
I mean about targets. Or
you can read Mayakovsky/he's
a sort of Communist Bruce Dawe.

While I'm quite confident this poem means what it says and I'm positive it doesn't have any hidden meaning, it does seem to me that the history of real-estate agents in Australia is more illuminating about Australian poetry than the history of Australian poetry has been. And though the poetry can't be blamed for this, you'd think more of the poets would have been aware that their work was contained within the display case of a land office. And this suggests a definition of colonial as being formally constrained but oblivious to it, or convinced that what John Tranter called "the handcuffs of rhyme and the critical strictures of the English Department" was the only safe way to deal with all that sunburnt countryside. This situation is still with us although the forms of restraint have changed and the oblivion "centered" on other things. For example, the contemporary "radical" poets wear their Australian voice as if the tone in itself contained some guarantee of authenticity or at least effect; they see this the same way the English Department once viewed "the handcuffs of rhyme" etc. Their poems deal with the specifics of human misery via the compressed, "significant" narrative although the audience— certainly the appreciative audience— is not the same as the people they write about. It is analagous with the way Australian poetry appropriates the landscape to its own purposes, under the impression that they were doing it a favor. And when such contemporary poetry succeeds it does so by way of what Banjo Patterson would've called the "common touch" and what we call "charisma" in Nigel Roberts, Eric Beach, T.O. or for that matter John Singleton. By comparison the claims made for Bruce Dawe as having an "authentic Australian voice", while still ridiculous at least seem honest— like Doug Walters compared with Greg Chappell. Romanticism of this sort commits the writer to some illusion of which writing is the effective sign—if this destroys the writer well fair enough, but when the illusion is the writers' idea of the Revolution, it's depressing to see them prosper thereby. The writer's commitment to that which is beyond writing but within a discourse he cannot control must

end in silence or a routine of lip service. Mayakovsky's fate is an illustration of this and there are some lines by Pasternak that bear on how this procedure works:

> The Great Soviet gives to the highest passions
> In these brave days each one its rightful place
> Yet vainly leaves one vacant for the poet
> When that's not empty, look for danger's face

The place of poetry is vacant necessarily and it's an illusion to imagine that writing is even at the service of its subject matter; the reverse holds true, because "writing" is always its own end: it may be numbered among the "highest passions" but its not a natural one. Most poets assume it is and writing defeats them by way of "Literature" and they end up with that index of defeat mentioned before, "a personal style". Of course those who write about poetry as if all writing is included in "Literature" regard "a personal style" as an achievement. And it is, given the reasons why they regard poetry as central and important:

> Put a brick through
> a real estate agent's window
> and it bounces back
> and cuts you.

"Literature" is the after-effects of this event— that change in the status of what's written which naturalises, or rather neutralises writing as literature. And the Australian writer, as I outlined before, is rewarded as a producer of "Literature". The variations in personal style are like the range inside the real-estate agency, from rented terrace to rambling bungalow in Mosman. But to describe it this way implies both a distance from a situation I am part of; it also suggests an alternative, which, given the terms I'm using, is not possible. It's a truism that attacks on "Literature" merely renew it and it is Literature that saturates Australian writing— the more innocent its practitioners the more totally controlled their work is by pre-determined categories of meaning and response. And most of those who are aware of this saturation see it as a Golden Shower the source of which is variously England, Europe, New York, or in extreme cases— Zulu cattle myths. Similarly various types of cultural universalism are employed by the drought-stricken Australian poet, desperate for

some legitimising myth; hence the poet's tendency to congregate in universities or irrigated bohemian oases. I'm not here offering any as yet undiscovered Australian inland sea as an alternative— the results of white Australian poets taking as the trappings, either Aboriginal myth or Aboriginal metre are too ludicrous to contemplate. This situation also gives rise to poetry that is self-consciously important, yet devoid of the formal invention necessary to carry off its ambitions. And so we arrive at the situation that now prevails, where the writing that's most flattered to be taken as "Literature" achieves the least distinction as writing; Australia is full of incredibly serious writers; you can read about them in the *National Times*. And the true index of what the literary institutions think of Australian writing can be gauged from the fact that their attention and the rewards that flow from it, is best gained by being published overseas. For them all the problems I've been fielding don't really exist— secretly they believe that Overseas is the *fons et origo* of literary legitimacy and given this state of affairs the whole activity of writing would be better off divorced from the myth of "Literature" entirely.

Certainly the image of "the poet" with which I began writing poetry is as impractical as a means of sustaining poetry as it was an idealised construct to begin with. If there is a model for Australian poets now I'd suggest its provided by those non-academic, non-bohemian writers of America in the 1920's: the gynaecologist William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens the insurance executive.

Footnotes

[1] Robert Gray, Introduction to two poems: *In the early hours...* and *The Motel Room* in *Meanjin* 40 (summer issue 1980) p520

[2] John Tranter, (ed) *The New Australian Poetry* Makar Press, St. Lucia Qld (1979) pxxv.

[3] ibid. pxvii

Import Rhetoric:

"Semiotics in/and Australia"

I. *Catatonia.*

The actual title of my paper was supposed to be something like "import-export metaphors in theoretical debate". When I first suggested that, I wanted to look at the function of a rhetoric which identifies "ideas", "philosophies", "texts", and sometimes "movements" as items which can be imported— or rather, which can be usefully discussed in terms of an economic metaphor (since when the work of Althusser or Foucault is described an an "imported theory", for example, we clearly mean something different from, and more than, the constraints of the trade in books). I intended to concentrate on examples from, small journals which do not pose "the foreign" as an object of suspicion, but which do admit "the import" as the site of a problem; and I hoped to focus my remarks on the strange invocations of semiotics to be found in some of these texts.

Instead, for reasons which I'll really be spending most of my time explaining, I've asked Anne Freadman to share the space of a paper with me. Anne teaches in the French Department of the University of Queensland, and does theoretical research in semiotics. I don't know what her half of the paper is called: we haven't dovetailed or unified what we have to say, and we aren't speaking as the two heads of one foreign body. I hope that discussion can come out of the differences in what we have to say and how we say it as much as from the points in common which will probably emerge.

But (since this is Sydney) I should say right away that I'm not introducing Anne as an authority on semiotics who can set us right about what semiotics really is. Nor did I ask Anne to speak so that she could fix the signified of semiotics for us in a way that I'd be too cowardly to attempt myself in case I got low marks for transgression. To do so might well discredit any speech which might follow; since in Sydney, at least, one of the by-products of debates on identity, fixity and subject-position in discourse seems to be a politics of speech whereby the very act of affirmation is decreed in advance to be suspect. What I did want to do was to hear another voice rather than my own: since I'd

come to a point in the paper I'd planned to give where I wanted to talk about the subtitle of the conference, "semiotics in/and Australia", and it seemed a good idea to ask someone else to do so who might be able to break the monotony of either denunciation of, or distancing from, this discourse which is everywhere invoked and nowhere to be heard. It seemed all too appropriate that this paper is in the middle of the conference, since so far "semiotics" has been the signifier of a dead centre, an empty space, a silence, something that can't be said or shouldn't be said —and I wanted to blot the neatness of that composition a bit. Also, when I started to look at examples of import rhetoric I found myself more and more interested in manoeuvres of distancing in general from ("in/and") the construct Australia. But I didn't feel that I could give a positive voice to semiotics myself, even for the purposes of posing a temporary position for discussion. Because semiotics in the formal sense is not something which I see myself as *doing*. I just like to listen to it very closely— which is where my attitude differs, perhaps, from that of some of the other speakers.

This elaborate series of *nots* is symptomatic of the difficulties I had preparing this paper, or any paper at all, for this conference— which unexpectedly had me in hives and nausea for a week when I sat down to do it. It may also explain why my half of the paper, if it's got a title, is called *Catatonia*. I heard someone at a film forum once define that as a mode of Australian speech. At any rate, it isn't in the Concise Oxford Dictionary I've got. But it seemed to be a convenient image of the phenomenon— or the fate— which the texts evoking importation as a problem seemed to be warding off— the silence of the stunned mullet. That state, that same sense of amazed bewilderment, was also the state which came over me as I tried to write something, anything at all. Last night I found myself threatened with the thought that really all I had to say at the moment was that I find it very difficult to do any work here, to speak or write here; and then this suddenly reduced itself down to the even more Laconic statement, *SYDNEY SUCKS*.

Now this statement coming up out of the void surprised me enormously with its bashful and bitter brevity— since I know quite well that that is not at all what I do want to say. So instead of taking refuge in anecdotes of personal discomfort, which lend themselves all too easily to the traditional psycho-critiques directed against so-called "Europeanised" intellectuals in Australia, it seemed best to improvise on the assumption that my difficulty arose from a mirror involvement, I suppose, with the texts I was trying to deal with; and to continue on the further assumption that it can be worth talking about problems of silence

and speech— not in order to feed the psycho-critiques with their fictional characters turning tormented and longing eyes towards the foreign, but precisely in order to see what has been said about the conditions in which the work that gets done here, gets done.

So I've improvised three layers which I'd like to talk briefly about. I think they correspond to three ways of posing an image of the void that we've really been talking about since the beginning of the conference; that is, not a void which is held to exist somewhere out there in Australian society or nature, but an image of a void in the shadow of which certain discourses start to elaborate themselves— or to look for a point of departure.

First of all, import rhetoric: to consider "importation" as a figure describing a speech impediment, if you like, or as posing explicitly a problem of enunciation. Enunciation I take to be the grammatical relations holding between the personal pronouns and deixis in discourse; that is, I/you, he/she/it, here/there, now/then. But in most cases, I'll simply be using the term as an organising metaphor for discussing the relations some text pose between writing, reading, time and place. In doing so, I'm aware that I'm questioning an economic metaphor (importation) by means of a linguistic one (enunciation). I should stress that the point of this is not to assert the analytical primacy of linguistics over economics, nor indeed to suggest that a discussion of texts which borrows its terms from linguistics thereby gains some special privilege or insight. The point of confronting the two metaphors— or of abolishing one in the other— is simply that it gives me a practical means of making some distinctions, and of asking questions which can't easily be raised within the terms of the existing import-discussion.

Secondly I want to mention an example of quite different work which dramatises I/you, here/there, now/then oppositions as a problem of breaking silence; and there I'd like to talk about the obvious example of Manning Clark's essays on writing history in Australia.

Then thirdly, just before I pass on to Anne, I'd like to question the function of the signifier "semiotics". Why is it that "semiotics" comes to have an oddly ambiguous, reversible status? On the one hand, "semiotics" (usually when constructed as "science") is the silent, empty, dead centre, the absent, what "we" don't do; on the other, it comes to signify babble, plurality, disruption, multiplication— what "we" do do. A non-science, maybe an anti-epistemology, and even— perhaps— An Art.

Now in setting up these layers for a paper, I haven't made something sundered and subversive and sparkling like a prism. It's much more like the layers of a very soggy cake where the slices lean in to each other without much definition or separation.

I think I first became interested in import rhetoric through having been a student in a French department here, where semiotics was not posed as foreign at all. (The not-posing of the foreign is, in a sense, the problem of the boredom and dullness of French departments— a sign of their lack of engagement with anything else that's going on around them). So having had that background, I was increasingly mesmerised as I read by the proliferating references you find in British, Australian and some American material to what you might call "the French disease". French disease in history has been all sorts of things from syphilis and oral sex to endemic extravagance, hysteria and instability.

There's nothing mysterious in itself about the existence of notions like this, since "Frenchness" as a signifier in our advertising system (to go no further afield) is very common. What I do, perhaps naively, find hard to understand is the frequency with which people who seem— to judge from their writing— to be otherwise fairly sedate, cool and cautious academics can so often, so often that it's amazing when you line up the examples, begin an essay or an article with a full paragraph of frenzied frothing about the instabilities of Paris fashion. The repetitiveness with which this occurs as an opening gambit seems to me to be quite breathtaking— especially in contexts where an equally common cliche might be that sarcasm or abuse is no substitute for argument. The technique now breeds its own ironies: so that Colin Gordon, in his Preface to *Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge*, can turn it round to "the gyrating nebula of Gallic luminaries which *we* have been so arduously and querulously observing".

Diatribes on the dangers of "French ideas" always remind me irresistably of the phrase attributed to Bjelke-Peterson, "Just because a few wogs want their spicey tucker doesn't mean Australian health has to be put at risk". A similar view was quite strongly expressed by a few speakers at the Art Workers' Union forum last year on "Should Australian Art Have A National Content?". During the discussion, the notion that "foreign" ideas are imported in exactly the same way as camembert was combined with hygiene metaphors (the tainting, contagion, infection and invasion threatening the health of local culture) to produce an overwhelming sense of impending foot and mouth disease. Apart from being comic, this way of posing the problem made it hard to distinguish between the gallery system, the art market, a range of political problems confronting Australian artists and viewers, the options which might be invented— and the very possibility of asking questions about art practice and politics in ways which might also question notions of "nation"

and "content" was thus completely blocked off.

So it seemed to be an interesting project to stop taking "the problem of importation" for granted, and to examine instead the function of *invoking* the problem inside various debates. (I'd still like to do that some day). But in thinking about "import-*export* metaphors in theoretical debate" I was probably guilty of hasty thought, careless phrasing, and probable contagion from the discourse of the film industry. Because the material I've read doesn't, in fact, rely on an import-export opposition but on something like imports vs. homegrown. I haven't, as yet, come across the idea that *exporting* theoretical work is something we do; the "problem" is exclusively one of importation, and Australia is the space to which things come. (We have certainly had a discourse on the brain-drain of bodies. And my impressions might well be different if I had looked at scientific or medical journals).

However one thing which prompted the hasty reference to exports was a light argument in Donald Horne's *Money Made Us*, which is not a book I'd want to recommend in any other way, but there were a couple of paragraphs there on exports. He discusses the function of export rhetoric in Australia in the mid-1950s, and he relates it to the idea that trade is intrinsically British. He argues that for urban Australians in that period, exports were "lived" as a type of community drama in which Australia becomes a space which exists for exports, and so watching over the health of the export industries is a matter of the story of the national future, and so on. Now (going from the sublime to something else) it seemed to me that in the small journals of the 70s, imports are also "lived" as a kind of community drama— except that the problem posed by the story is not one of "the" community's future but of the existence of any community at all.

Among the examples of references to cultural importation in general, there seems to be a clear distinction between two types of writing. I really haven't read enough to be definite; I don't work to a tertiary timetable and I don't have time for research. But I think you could say provisionally that there are at least two ways in which "importing" is set up as a problem. One uses a basic opposition which is usually the mark of— to caricature— a cultural nationalist approach; a simple opposition between the indigenous and the foreign. These terms can be mediated by others, like "adaptation", or "transformation", or by recommendations and permissions for synthesis. This type of writing, which sometimes has a very strong indigenous-Maoist streak through it, usually situates itself *vis a vis* on the one hand a discourse on imperialism, and on the other a fairly conventional

history of ideas approach where ideas have origins, and influences happen between thinker and thinker. Now I'm not concerned here with contesting this approach, and I'm not going to look at it in detail. But I would want to say that it establishes but doesn't dramatise certain assumptions about I/you, here/there and now/then.

Cultural nationalist writing tends to use collectivised oppositions between "we" and "you", "us" and "them". A "we" is asserted as existing (perhaps as a type of political consciousness) while an "us", an objective— that is, the national culture in some sense— remains in the future or in the past and has to be fabricated and/or to be re-discovered. The relations to "you" and "them" can be inclusive, exhortatory or purely polemical depending on a play of allegiance and identification. A "here/there" dichotomy is assumed to be real and fairly simple: although there are lots of conceptual problems about Australia's place in world capitalism and about theories of cultural imperialism, nevertheless space *per se* has no density in cultural nationalist writing. Location, in a sense, is the *a priori*; "we live here", and the fun begins after that. It's when it comes to "now" and "then" that cultural nationalist writing starts to get complicated, to address its real problem— which is, of course, history. "Then" produces the "now", but the then, the past, has to be rediscovered, it needs to be known correctly according to the needs of the future; and it has to be disengaged from the layers of misinterpretation and misrecognition of Australian history— a history which our compromised present, in some sense, has allowed us to forget, to lose or to bury. I'm thinking there about the recurring debates about the status of the 90's in Australian literature, or the one about the work of the radical nationalist writers; and I think you could probably put the recent debate about Margaret Preston in the same broad category.

So in this type of writing, a lot depends on solidarity (the collective "we" and "us" which has to be invented), on locatability (we are located, we live here) and on history. The parameters of the project itself seem to impose a discourse on identity— not just national or cultural identity (whether openly assumed as a value, or reflected upon as a product of history), but also the call for a programme in which speakers identify themselves, take a position in a struggle. That's outrageously reductive, and I should say immediately that I am *not* claiming that, conversely, all writing on history and/or identity can be characterised in those terms.

But if my general description is accepted as a stereotype of a mode of enunciation, then it can be argued that there is a range of

quite different texts where "importation" is cited as a problem not only of history, but of discourse itself. These are texts which worry about "the reader", about the socio-cultural contexts of discursive events, and which— while possibly assuming the foreign in some way, even an ironic way like the title of this conference— are primarily concerned about effects and operations in Australia, the effect of the act of speaking in Australia— how *do* you speak? The sign of this, and what differentiates it from the work I was speaking about before, is often an elaborately tangled, even traumatised and thicket-line, set of shifts in the I/you relationship worked through in the texts, where the "you" is a posited or sought-for reader and the text keeps folding back on itself to discuss the process of writing and your problems of reading as a reader. This writing slides between "here" and "there", can't quite make up its mind where it is, doesn't really want to make up its mind, and tends toward an interest in historiography rather than an appeal to history. Among the small journals, examples here would be the old *Working Papers*, *Random Issue* (although importation hasn't been a major drama in its pages) and a set of three texts in a recent issue of *Hecate*, which I'd like to look at more closely in a while.

Here there's no question of "identity" crisis. It's not a matter of asking whether Australian intellectuals are Australian or colonised, or of debating which ones are which, and it's not a matter of lamenting that we don't know who we are. That is not the issue. Rather, this sort of writing poses, I think, an explicit problem of position and dislocation *in discourse*; the problem of producing a place to speak in a "here" which is either still uncertain or already over-familiar. It isn't writing which worries about who speaks it, but about how it *can* be spoken, how it should be spoken, and where it's spoken from and to whom and with what potential effect. In distinguishing this from a stereotype of "cultural nationalist" writing, I think you can distinguish two quite different uses of import rhetoric— or the posing of the possibility of two types of catatonia. One is the problem of falling into a space where you no longer know who you are because you are spoken by something else; and the second is one of lapsing into an imaginary void where the problem *might* become that you don't know how to speak or what to speak it to.

In looking at examples of Type Two Catatonia, I thought I should start with *Working Papers*, a journal I was involved with which published three issues from early 1976 to late 1977. On re-reading them, I found that there was quite a bit of talk about the dangers of "theoretical importations"— but it's very hard to tell from the texts exactly what the dangers were supposed to be, or

what exactly is meant by the notion of importation in the first place. There is (and I think this is perhaps a general condition of much of the work of the mid-70s) a great deal of anxiety and anguish about the desirability of importation which coexists, very uneasily, with a flagrant and flaunted pleasure in translating. The translations are there all over the place, and sidling up next to them are these constipated little writings about: "maybe there's some danger in doing this...".

I think that this combination— pleasure in translation and anguish about importation— gives the rhetorical curlicues of a discourse of self-protection: apologetic, an argumentative defence which serves as a means of enabling speech. An apologetic poses an Other (who shifts between "the reader" and someone else s/he knows) as a someone who is about to be offended: "you or someone else or maybe both of you may be about to be offended, and it is my certainty of you as about to be offended which now allows me to speak in order to vindicate myself". I don't know if you see what I mean; but it's the kind of manoeuvre where you set up the idea that someone is going to expect you to vindicate yourself— which is what gives you a permission to break silence. In order to write, you must— according to this logic— produce from the very first moment a guaranteed hostile reader (who is, at least, a reader whom you can now assume you "have").

In these texts there are vague suggestions of particular problems which may happen (or which happened) off-page: the problem of the constraining criticism of others, the sense of weariness at the repetitive process of establishing that what one is saying is not what one is held to be saying by someone else....That comes up in *Random Issue* too, where people write about their difficulties in talking about their work in an English department context where it can be translated back into that which Leavis or Frye have always already said, a curl back to silence being imposed from the outside. I suspect that in *Working Papers* what is being fended off is a charge that the journal was only re-articulating a form of "Sydney" libertarianism— but that, interestingly, is never really said except by a few oblique allusions in the first editorial to the practice of a prior journal, *GLP*.

Another suggested problem raised through import-reference was, through the Althusser case, the discovery of a mystery of Foreign Affairs: a polemical insistence (once again addressed to an implied hostile reader) that there could be a political situation in an elsewhere which gave meanings to a text which might be different from the meanings produced here. But above all, running constantly through the work of that period, is a theme of

alien-ating the audience— the problem of making alien the "you" of the text.

Those texts originated, I think, in a context which was still one of proselytism and commitment to political movements, the kind of commitment which produces the injunction to argue along the lines that "this stuff may be foreign and imported but we're translating it because it's potentially *useful*...". What for is not very clear: but we certainly can't take it upon ourselves to determine on your behalf what it's useful for— that's up to *you*... So once again, the site of the problem is a reader. And that same context of commitment or proselytising desire (which was, in the case of *Working Papers*, a history of minor lines of flight from Gay Liberation, feminism and anti-psychiatry) provides a knot of assumptions about the "problem" of *accessible language*— again, a problem constructed for a reader— as a variant of the theme of the foreign import. For the texts are not only determined as "foreign" in geographical terms (coming from or inspired by work in France), but also *pre*-determined as potentially alienating to implied readers whose vocabulary is, in a sense, assumed to be foreign to these texts. Thus "accessibility" is alluded to in the editorials of *Working Papers* (all two of them) as part of the project of usefulness: "We feel that accessibility and clarity would enhance their value for promoting further investigations" (*Working Papers 1*).

It's interesting that this is invoked before the project has properly begun; or, to be more precise, in the very moment that the project is announced. It's not just that the readers' desire for accessibility functions as yet another initiating fiction for making speech possible in a "here" where it needs to be justified anew each time. For me, it's even more striking that the import rhetoric has such force that it allows the accessibility-problem to emerge in those terms in a context which should "know better" — know better, that is, because the type of knowledge being peddled should imply quite a different model of reading. I'd like to expand on that for a moment.

In most discussions of the so-called "politics of theoretical writing", accessibility and clarity are treated as virtually synonymous— or else clarity is considered to be one of the means by which accessibility (and thereby, obscurely, some form of "effectiveness") is achieved. The ideal of clarity has been battered a little in recent years, partly through arguments about its history as a value (for example the proverb attributed to Lacan, "clarity is a bourgeois concept"), and partly through the practical argument that new thoughts develop in new language which must, at first sight, seem to be unclear. The bridge between these two counter-attacks on clarity is usually an appeal to the "work" of the reader. But the battering of clarity need only serve to make

the notion of accessibility a little more flexible: through the work of the reader, more things eventually do become "clear". So we're back to where we started, that is, with ideals of what is to be achieved *by the writer* before the writing is read. This model fits quite easily with another time-honoured model of "theor*ists*" as skilled knowledge-workers with a duty to simplify—and clarify—in their writing the special knowledge which they already hold prior to that writing and to which the readers are supposed to need access (whether they know so or not). Where this model holds sway (say, for example, the 70s *Intervention* at one end of the spectrum, and *Scarlet Woman* or *Filmnews* today at another end), it seems to me logical and proper that clarity-and-accessibility, or clarity-for-accessibility, should be invoked as objectives from time to time.

But in contexts where this model of "the theorist" is not only under attack, but under attack in terms borrowed or stolen from theories of text as productivity rather than of language as a vehicle for ideas, it is at least peculiar to come across exactly the same invocation. Because it should be quite easy to distinguish the "clarity" value, and all the disadvantages which go with it, from a notion of accessibility which anyone alert to links between language and power would (presumably?) wish to retain. Clarity, with its overtones of clear-and-distinct ideas, one word = one thing, and notions of Just expression, is an *attribute*: a quality desired from a passive, inert text. It's an endowment; a gift to give inferiors, to share in communion with equals and to display to asessing superiors. Clarity goes hand in hand with hierarchy and stability, and reaffirms both in discourse. Accessibility, on the other hand, seems to me to be something which *happens*. It's not an attribute, but the outcome of an event; accessibility can be of greater or lesser duration, can be lasting or ephemeral, depending on the needs and desires of *all* those concerned in any given situation. It does *not* simply depend on the personal responsibility and good will of an individual or group considered to be the source of a text. Accessibility isn't a property of texts at all, but a social occurrence.

At least, that's one way of defining a difference. Here's another one from Gertrude Stein, quoted in the Introduction to *How To Write*:

> Mr. Owen Young made a mistake, he said the only thing he wished his son to have was the power of clearly expressing his ideas. Not at all. It is not clarity that is desirable but force.
>
> Clarity is of no importance because nobody listens and nobody knows what you mean no matter what you mean, nor how clearly you mean what you mean. But if you have vitality enough of knowing enough of what you mean, somebody and sometime and sometimes a

> great many will have to realise that you know what you mean and so they will agree that you mean what you know, what you know you mean, which is as near as anybody can come to understanding anyone.

However this distinction depends on a cheerfulness and certainty of seriousness which the conditions of catatonia may possibly preclude.

To return to my argument: Using *Working Papers* as my main example (despite the inhibiting conviction, also catatonia—inducing, that to speak anywhere elsewhere than behind closed doors of a project one has been involved in is to commit an act of gross indecency in public. As though speech is, of itself, so suspiciously momentous that it must, despite disclaimers, convert a case into a monument and carry a plea for importance.) I've been suggesting that import rhetoric actually functions as the mark of a speech impediment; that in the case of texts traversed by reader-anxiety rather than nationalist desire, it is a response to the assumption that the right to speak "here" at all is in question or will be called into question by somebody else; further, that that somebody else is likely to argue that your speech is not necessary because what you have to say has already been said in another, more native tongue; and that "they" will also assume that unless speech *is* a matter of necessity it is far, far better to hold your tongue at the tea-table.

At least, that's how it seems to work in the texts in the mid-70s. Later, George Alexander in a text called "Introduction: On Editorial Strategies", said something which I think re-posed the problem of imports in a way which is much more pertinent now. "Analysis of the problem of importation", he said, "soon shows that it functions in such a way that the contributor to an Australian journal in these matters becomes aware of 'Australia' in a way that no French writer is preoccupied with 'France' ". I think you could probably argue that some British writers are preoccupied with 'Britain' in a similar way— but here that's not my problem.

In that article George mentioned two alternative forms of *assertive* discourse, neither of which seemed acceptable. One is an assertive nativism, White Australia in theory— the belief that this place is Ours like Sydney University's jacaranda tree. The other is what he called assertive internationalism, in which things become, he said, "suggestive to the point of bewilderment"— comparing this bewilderment to the bored schoolkids' understanding of *"mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa"* as "me a cowboy, me a cowboy, me a Mexican cowboy". Now I think

that in this conference we've got to the point of setting off with the Mexican cowboy as our point of departure, which hopefully might mean that we'll be hearing much less about the "import-problem"— although it's been raised several times in discussions here already.

So I'd like to conclude this section with one last example. In the latest issue of *Hecate* (Vol. VI, No. 2, 1980) there are three texts which form a sort of collage, called "Round and Round the Looking Glass: Three Responses to Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms*", by Anna Gibbs, Rosie Braidotti & Jane Weinstock, and Nancy Huston. I think that the problem they're addressing is the relationship between the *mea culpa* and the Mexican cowboy. (The book in question is a set of translations, published in America, of a number of texts by French women, complete with a very-American editorial Introduction—which is succintly analysed by Braidotti and Weinstock). Their point of departure is a problem of a gap in meaning— between "original" and translation, the "step across the Atlantic".

There's a prefatory note to these pieces, in which you get a very strange series of shifts happening. This text is different from the others I've mentioned, firstly because it actually mentions importation *along with* the problems of translation, and secondly because the word "exportation" finally pops up. But why this is so is explained in the beginning, where there's an identification of speakers and a location of them in the past: "The working group... *consisted* of English-speaking feminists resident for various reasons and various lengths of time in *Paris*" (my emphasis). It goes on to explore questions of how and why information circulates, and then comes back— or forward— to a present and a here: "There *remains* the problem of communicating with an Australian audience... In a country which is too often simply the recipient of American cultural production, it is easy to overlook the specificity of our own feminist context. Moreover, the number of translations of French feminist work circulating *here* is extremely limited, and once again *we* are receiving word from France via the United States" (my emphasis again).

If you look at the parameters of space and time in this text it's absolutely dizzying, because you get into circles where "English-speaking" feminists ("them") who were in Paris become an Australian "we" working in Australia, narrating the having-been in Paris, and looking at the process of reception which goes from France via the United States to Australia and was analysed in France by women who are now presented as about-to-write for an Australian audience. And the move produces yet another recurrence of the "Australian

audience" problem— the problem of communicating *with*, communicating as a drama of enunciation, what "you" is there to speak to "here", how can we talk... And in fact, the rhetoric of cultural trade only allows the word "'exportation" to emerge in this text because of the shifting relation to "Paris". When in Paris, one exports. When in Australia, we.....

In vulgar terms, you could probably take a distinction from the history of the polemics of the visual arts here and reformulate what I've been vaguely calling reader-anxiety as a search for a way of "writing Australian", in contrast to the notion of Australian writing. Import-rhetoric could then be seen as articulating a desire for a nationalised enunciation. "Australian writing" is a problem for cultural nationalism; one of source, origin, identity and authenticity. But "writing Australian" is developed in import metaphors as a dream of finding a way to speak in a here-and-now which isn't easily identifiable, and so can't stay still as a stable point of departure for speech (hence the function of aggro and apologetic in getting things off the ground).

At this point, it could be objected that I've been disingenuous in discussing the writing of *Working Papers, Random Issue* or the *Hecate* texts simply in these terms. Surely, you could say, the curlicues of the rhetoric are due precisely to the foreign input— warped or clumsy imitations of tricksy writers like Barthes who provide, in their pursuit of some decadent dream of modernism in theory, a model which disciples in distant lands strive vainly to repeat. It's a possible explanation. But I'd like to keep on being disingenous, long enough to set up quite a different connection.

If you assume that the debate about the desirability of "importing" theories is not quite as simple and straightforward as it seems, and that something like a search for a nationalism in enunciation is at stake, then you could argue that in Manning Clark's essays on writing history you find something complementary— a nationalism of the *énoncé*, a nationalism of the statement, the search for an Australian signified.

In his four essays "Writings on History" in *Occasional Writings and Speeches*, there's an elaboration of the notion of history as a pre-existing language; and the problem is not so much to speak Australia, for Clark, as to speak Australia within that language of history. Where the import figures in the journals I looked at work as enabling devices for bringing into being a discourse which does not yet exist, for Clark the problem of beginning is how to pull off a conjuring trick against silence to produce an Australian signified which can be smoothly integrated into that language—the language of narrative history as the story of the human race and so on. His programme, as he repeats again and again, is to endow Australian history with

significance, to produce the rage of Ned Kelly, to fall into the mind of Menzies staring into the grave of Evatt. He wants to take the sound and the babble of Australian events and make them *mean*. The codes are already available:

> Don't use the verb to be; don't use the passive voice; don't use more than one adverb to modify a verb, for if you feel you must then your choice of verb has failed you; don't use jargon, such as 'however', of 'of course', 'in the light of', 'with a view to' etc., etc., etc.; don't discuss the problems of writing with the reader; don't tell the reader what is happening, or comment on what is happening, that is don't act the role of a coach captain on a tourist bus and comment on the scene, but let the scene speak for itself. All the great stories of mankind are told without any comment at all. Perhaps that is why they have outlived their generation, and said something to men at all times and in all places. If the writer intervenes then he puts the stamp of his own generation on his work. ("A Discovery of Australia")

Apart from the notion of representation in which the scene speaks and not "me", the striking thing here is the force and intensity of the injunction to eliminate discourse (the importers' playground) from history-writing. Good history must be timeless and placeless— neither here nor there, nor now nor then.

But there remains the problem of the conjuring-trick. For in these essays, I think the real drama in what somebody called Clark's "theatre of representation" is quite explicitly that of the "having something to say"— something, that is, out of nothing. There's a little fable in the essay called "Writing History in Australia" which I'd like to cheat with a bit. Here's the opening of it— it was a speech delivered, a public speech:

> Thank you for asking me to speak to you about the writing of history. I suppose you thought that anyone who had spent most of his adult life trying to teach or write Australian history would have something to say about the subject. That was also my hope. But when I came to think about what to say to you I found myself in the same situation as Old Mother Hubbard. You remember:
>
> Old Mother Hubbard
> Went to the cupboard

To fetch her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

After the apology (nobly humble rather than aggressively paranoid, although he does go on to allude to savage dogs turning on the old lady), the next step is to "borrow" something to say— and he finds it in *The Wild Duck*.

There is, I think, a juxtaposition of the homely and the foreign which is repeatedly used to structure these essays and which is a very common ploy in an extraordinary number of Australian texts. A recent example is Tim Burns' film *Against the Grain*, which opens with a quotation from Jean Genet and a shot of the Tin Sheds. But the juxtaposition can be used in a number of different ways; and where in *Against the Grain* the homely and the foreign are used to grate against each other and generate questions through the sparks of incongruity (the terrorist in the kitchen with his mum), in Clark's text the homely saying is an initiatory ploy— it performs the rupturing of silence, and then the "foreign" comes in, to be domesticated as the universal and pre-existing language which makes sense of the home and the spirit of place. So here the juxtaposition is an integration device.

Now Manning Clark in that speech is obviously not saying that Australian history is a silence, but rather that silence has a history in Australian history. For him ("Being an historian" in the essay "A discovery of Australia"), having something to say is deliberately raised up against the danger of the threat of catatonia; it demands a blow struck against silence in a Promethean search for speech. In this essay, he gives up a full-blown elaboration of the myth of the Great Risk— in one of those embarrassing generalisations which do trigger off recognitions and identifications yet which seem to be absolutely untenable:

> Let me tell you what I saw when I took the risk not only of opening a window on our past, but that much greater risk of trying, all very imperfectly, to tell Australians what I saw. For it is a great risk ever to show your view in Australia. Our past has made us cruel mockers. All vulnerable men (sic) need to wear a mask when talking to Australians.

Leaving aside the past as cause, the window, and the dream of a naked speech, I simply want to suggest that the import-debate

might be better understood— and displaced— if located in the context of writings about speech and danger in Australia; and secondly, to note that Clark's Promethean posture (and I do not mean that in a pejorative sense) rests on a confiding mode of address— the ploy of producing a fiction of a common language: "You remember" Old Mother Hubbard? "Let me tell you what I saw...": *you're* not the problem, reader, except insofar as *they* are, the Australians, and we are all of us one with them— which the dislocated discourses of your paranoid journals find it impossible, or undesirable, to sustain.

Needless to say, this is all in the realm of myth. In talking about figures of silence and speech, I haven't presumed to propose explanations, causal or otherwise. In any attempt to explain the tracings of logophobia in Australian texts, there would be at least two temptations to be avoided. One is the temptation of the national psychodrama evoked in the Clark text quoted above. The other is probably the banal, anecdotal equivalent of that: the temptation to take literally the theme of the fear of speech, to look around, and to find in the conditions of daily life the "evidence" that speaking is indeed a dangerous thing to do. It would be easy enough to make lists of those common, quirky occurrences which make up a protocol, a set of discursive "manners": the fears of stealing speech at work in phrases like "No, I'm not saying *you* were saying that but... Look, I'm really not trying to say I'm right but...I don't know, I'm really not sure if I'm saying anything but...". Those are formulas for self-protection and a quick exit. At the other end of the range would be the violence of personalised criticism; the habit of refusing argument or contact *with* the speech of others, in favour of the reassurance of diagnosing their motives for speaking (which are usually assumed to be as self-seeking and sordid as possible). Then there are the dismissal notices: "wanking" (reflexivity, unproductive labour) and "academic" (rarely referential when used, since it doesn't need to be) are special favourites.

It would be all the easier to list these since the weight of the banal is such that while manners like this may well be responsible for numerous individuals shutting up or shipping out, it's usually considered bad theoretical manners to mention it. But doing so is, nevertheless, a temptation: because in place of the grand opera of national character, you soon hear the strains of subcultural Soap.

Well, what about "semiotics in/and australia"? What I've done, I think, is to make two neat little compartments: Clark's nationalism of the énoncé, with its homely/foreign juxtapositions working as the enabling device for a common speech, and the journals' dream of an "Australian" enunciation, invoked through

import rhetoric and acts of alienating a reader who is thus, at least, possessed. The setting up of "semiotics" as foreign— something shifty which has to be related *to* "Australia"— seems to me to belong to the second compartment.

Semiotics, at the moment, here, is becoming a great mystery. You hear of it here and there, but if you look for it you won't find it anywhere. On the one hand, it is dismissed as a stage of past thought (e.g. *Random Issue I*: "It's not that we are trying to find our little specialism, construct a semiotic science of literature and "teach literature" as a geologist "teaches rocks")— but that "stage" in Australia seems to have left no traces whereby one can find out what it was. On the other, it is permitted a present existence as a sign of disruption (cf. the dossier on "Radical Politics and General Philosophy" in *Random Issue 2*, where "semiotics" occurs in a paradigm with Eastern philosophy, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, philosophies of non-systematicity and anti-totalitarianism, and Foucault). When this permission operates, however, it is important not to limit the force of semiotics with anything like definition. Semiotics then exists— like Australian enunciation— somewhere between silence and the renewed deferral of speech.

I don't have time to discuss this now or to substantiate what I'm saying. But some curious problems came up in research for an article on "Semiotics in Australia" that Anne and I were asked to write for an American book with the hilarious title, *The Semiotic Sphere*. On the assumption that the best way to proceed was not to take a pre-given definition of semiotics and then try to find "it", but rather to work out what "semiotics" actually means here, we asked a lot of people to write about how they saw semiotics in terms of their own practices. Looking at the texts, it soon became very clear that "semiotics" could mean everything and nothing. (Why? Why is that the case? Imagine a conference called "Foreign Bodies: linguistics in Australia". Or "Foreign Bodies: sociology in Australia". It doesn't have the same ring. Yet it isn't a matter of the institutional novelty of semiotics, since this very university has shown great unwillingness and great slowness to incorporate linguistics and sociology— both sciences of relatively recent claim to be recognised).

The interesting thing about the replies we received was, however, an astonishing uniformity of *distancing* from "semiotics" as signifier which came through. No matter what signified it was given, that semiotics was posed as a speech only assumed by somebody else. Nearly everybody who accepted to reply to us posited an orthodoxy of "semiotics" which existed somewhere else and defined, in its difference, the space of another activity. And this response did not break down into

noticeable political or institutional divisions of any kind— it was uniform across the entire, extremely diverse range of activities from professorial instruction to anarchic art.

So what I want to know is: what purpose does it serve to posit a semiotics which isn't what we do, and what purpose does it serve to posit an orthodox semiotics which we don't do any more, but we all know we never did it anyway?

Meaghan Morris.

II. On Being Here and Still Doing It

Speaking semiotics here is about doing semiotics now.

Speaking about semiotics is about somebody doing semiotics then (or there); or even just about 'semiotics then', as if it wasn't a doing.

This is a difference I want to make: between knowing about semiotics, —knowing that it is there—, and doing it.

I do semiotics: what sort of field is there available for the activities that this implies? When we say, as Peter did when he opened this conference, "this area", and when we claim that semiotics has something to do with the possibility— and the possibilities— of this area, but we're not sure what, we are both supposing a unity— however loose— for a set of problems and ways of thinking about them, and asking a rather emblematic and ill-defined word to name the difference of this set from other sets. This use of the term "semiotics" accounts for the maintaining of its foreignness and its foreignness accounts for the possibility of this use. But I use both the term "semiotics", and the set of activities it names— as part of the daily round of my most ordinary occupations; and as such, it cannot designate the magic unity of everything that is most interesting in various foreign avant-gardes. Nor can it designate their origin.

I'm going to take Paul's paper as a way of starting, as a way of trying to define *where* semiotics is in "this area", and perhaps why it's there, too. And in doing so, I shall not be doing a history or a definition of semiotics, or a glossary of its key terms, I shall be doing semiotics. Here and now.

In Paul's paper, we saw the three-stage unfolding of a statement about the relationship of maps and the world, a narrative that moves from fiction to action. The first stage is the stage that's defined by the quotation from Wilde and the paradoxes that arise from it: when we turn our back on the world and invent, only then is truth. This is the Romantic aesthetic, as distinct from the Realist, where realism is defined as the

reproduction, or mimesis, of a pre-existing reality, and the Romantic aesthetic is defined by the preeminence of imagination. This is the distinction between "Art" and "Life", the lie and the truth; this is the distinction that put the interpretation of literature in a set as far removed from logical semantics as it is from the inductive practices of the positive sciences; and it is this distinction that interpreted the simple absence of the referent from the saussurian definition of the sign as a permission, if not a stricture, to consider that definition of the sign as adequate to account for a semantics of language, and thence— without transition— for a semantics of the literary imagination. While it would be interesting to read the work produced by the practice of literary semiology as the outpourings of a retarded romanticism, informed less by the "sciences of language" to which it alluded with such vigour than by the inversion of Victorian morality (novels are fiction, therefore they are lies) on the one hand and the denial of the long since lost battle with science and technology on the other, I need only— for the purposes of this paper— to claim the possibility of such a reading. It is important, however, to show that all the elements of this bi-polar problematic were already in place: art and the world become, in the early work of semiotics, the *signifié* and the referent.

Whereupon "art" is replaced in this dichotomy by "language".

And, since language is considered as a sort of production mechanism for meaning, two things are thereupon excluded: talking about meaning as if it had its origin in speakers, and talking about meaning as if it had its origin in the world in its pristine innocence prior to Babel. Meaning springs unaided from the system of signs, having nothing to say but itself, and nothing to do but...

...invent a world to compensate this lack, and talk endlessly about the irreducible distance between itself and the real thing.

For in the early days of semiotics, the referent is naively supposed to *be* the real thing, to be there but banished to an elsewhere beyond the reach of language. Meaning neither arises from it, nor can it contain it, because meaning is now equivalent to fiction. So beside the power that is thereby bestowed on language there is also the despair of a nominalist impotence.

The fictions of the invented world— the images and simulacra wherein we contemplate it— are nonetheless of central importance: they are the stuff of the "cultural universe", they are what we work with. The second stage of Paul's syntagm is this question: how does movement *follow* maps? how, if these simulacra do not arise from the world, might they lead to it? The radical consequences of the total elimination of the referent are refused, and a second course taken. The referent, the linguists

started to say to us (crucially Benveniste, given a certain network of writings, but not only he), the referent, (they kept saying: "the referent"!)— pronouns, tenses, articles, quantifiers, adverbs— the referent is quite a different thing from denotation. This latter depends crucially on signification, but is pointed to in discourse by the referring mechanisms of language. So, with the grammar of reference, and the capacity of the system of signs to create denotata from signification, the matching up of these denotata with the real world comes later. The reintroduction of the referent in this second stage occurs when the referent is conceived as that which is produced by the signifying practices of language, and its relationship with "the world" is a relationship of hypothesis, a way of *approaching* the world. The referent here is in the future of the sign, not in its past. The object of knowledge is the product of an organisation of language.

The third stage of that syntagm is the question of strategy: if movement follows maps, then acting on the world also follows from producing it, and producing it is already action upon it. Hence a line of theoretical continuity: talking and politics, the Sign and World War III, the imaginary signifier and repression (third world or sexual)... The peculiarly shaped debate with pre-Althusserian Marxist theory: the subject, and the world, as subject to language, vs. the determinism of the economic base, can still be seen as formed by the bi-polar polemic between Art and Life: which, you can find people asking, comes first, the referent or the sign?

What I'm doing is taking that syntagm, simplified though it may be, as being something of a narrative of what has come to be known as post-semiotics. I suspect I'm making Paul's paper into a simulacrum of a history. The point of departure is the evacuation of the real, and the binary opposition of meaning vs. truth. Hence, I think, the preeminence of the methodologies of structuralist poetics; for with the virtual interchangeability of "language" and "art" as the opposite of the empirical, it is possible for "literature" to stand as the paradigm example of the world-creating powers of language, and for just those methods which attend to that postulate to become the methods of the semiotics of discourse in general. This is particularly clear in Barthes' practice which, by alternating systematically between object-texts within, and well outside of, the canons of literature, asserts both its non-compliance with the institutionalised hierarchies of discourses, and the political relevance of just those practices of reading that could not have emerged had those hierarchies not given to literature the place that they did. If we look at a jakobsonian "microscopie" side by side with Barthes' *S/Z*, for instance, we find a significant shift of attention away from the form of the

individual text towards the text as an intersection of codes[1]; yet across this shift, the maintaining of an attention to the text. The material of the text is *langue*, for Jakobson, and for Barthes, the plurality of codes, a play of signifiers for Jakobson, and a play of significations for Barthes. The structuralist concern with how the individual text works gives way to a concern with how a text produces the objects that it does; and these objects are the products of writing and reading: from signification in language to signification in discourse, from the signified, to the signifying practice.

Now there are two ways in which this seems to have produced "this area" we are calling "post-semiotics": either theories of art have become the model for theories of politics, with a line of development from "reading" to *Reading Capital*, from "codes" to "discursive formations"; or the exigencies of political theory are seen as radically other, such that the project becomes one of how to get past theories of language and theories of art. So this area of post-semiotics either stresses "the semiotic" or stresses "post". The latter position is most obviously exemplified by the Birmingham school, where it has been said that "nobody does semiotics any longer" and where the assumption is that semiotics served to provide a series— a rather small series— of tokenistic terms and footnotes to the authoritative texts of twenty years ago. This view trivialises semiotics to the level of intellectual fashion, but nonetheless points up what is common to both these ways of constituting "this area": both of them involve the statement that semiotics is what somebody used to do and what we had to know about in order to do what really matters. But it's not a thing to do, not here and now.

I want to define "semiotics" in that kind of discourse as a first frontier, and a frontier is a place you can't stay at. As a counter to that definition, on the other hand, I want to try and talk about it as a space for the emergence of certain problems. I shall do so by means of a rhetorical ploy; I shall set up the two ancestors of semiotics, Peirce and Saussure, not as sources and origins, but as a binary opposition which will help to delineate the parameters of this space. I shall be claiming that the ancestral texts are irreducibly different; I want even to claim that they are opposite kinds of projects, and by saying that they are opposite I would like to be able to claim that the diversity of contemporary semiotics can be organised by the same discursive space.

First, then, what you already know about Saussure, but retold

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[1] In Barthes' usage, "code" means something more restricted than in the use where it is equivalent to *langue*: may "codes" can be said in the same *langue*. I shall use the plural form for Barthes' usage, the singular for the saussurian sense.

so I can do my opposition: Saussure wrote a theory of language, he did not write the theory of semiotics as it was practised in the late 1960s. He came out of the practice of 19th century philology, and there are two facts about this practice that need to be borne in mind in order to understand the place of Saussure. The first is that it's historicist— it's about how one form derives from another form in a language, conceived across time; and the second is that it is posited on the assumption of the family of Indo-European languages, that is, that all the members of this family derive from the common origin of Proto-Indo-European.

Both of these positions in 19th century philology posit the continuity of language. This historicist position posits the continuity of language in time: despite all those minute changes in morphology, phonology and syntax, and indeed because the changes can be traced, philology asserts the identity of, for instance, *amare* with *aimer*, dunce with Duns (Scotus), *pater* with *père* and *vater*. Similarly, the postulate of Indo-European asserts the sameness of all Indo-European languages, a continuity across space— societies, cultures, and political frontiers. The real importance of Saussure lies not in his definition of the sign so much as in the reversal of these two positions that his definition of language effects: the methodological requirement of the synchronic reverses the historicist position of philology, while his definition of the object of linguistics— *langue*— entails the irreducible specificity of the individual tongue: the principle of *la langue* is the principle of this specificity.

Now that unity of *la langue*— language as defined by the geography of culture— is what defines the sign. It is a highly constrained notion, since nothing can be taken to be a sign except in reference to the code of which it is an element. Most specifically, the code provides the materiality of the signifier and the *value* of the signified— where it occurs in the paradigms of like and unlike signs which it can enter. The sign is an indissoluble unit of signifier and signified: this is the principle of signification. It follows that signification is language-specific.

Langue is the opposite of *parole* as the virtual is the opposite of the actual. *Langue* is the system *in virtu*: not the system in use, but the system available for use. Something like the dictionary: a fairly technical view of the dictionary, but the dictionary nonetheless. And the very fact that it's the dictionary accounts for the absence of reference in Saussure: only language in use refers, dictionaries don't. Saussure's dictum, that everything happens within the confines of the sign, follows strictly from the postulate of *la langue* as a repertoire.

But there is a problem when we get to *parole*. As you know, there is no theory of *la parole* in Saussure: *parole* is simply what

the *Course in General Linguistics* is not about. But it is defined out of existence: "individual" and "ephemeral", it is not the *use* of language but merely its *realisation*. As such, it cannot do anything that the definition of *langue* does not provide for; so reference is formally excluded.

So here is our first problem: how does semiotics start to talk about the problem of reference in the same epistemic space as the theory of language-specific signification? The answer will be that it will first encounter the need to do so, and that this need will arise when the object of study shifts from *langue* to the *uses of language*.

The migration of two projects— the project of poetics, and the project of functionalism, from the Moscow and the Prague circles respectively, and both in the itinerant figure of Jakobson— is of central importance in the delineation of what came to be the objects of semiotics in the 1960s. Russian Formalist poetics, and Prague functionalism both, in distinct ways, are concerned with language in the domain of *parole*: poetics being concerned with actual texts, with the text as mechanism, functionalism being concerned with mechanisms within language for the production of utterances. (The same general comment can be extended to include Propp's work, although what is distinctive about Propp is that it systematises the folk-tale in such a way as to show that there are codes at work in "utterances" that are in no way predicted by the repertoire of signs.) The two projects come together in Jakobson's work, poetics in the practice of the "microscopies" and in the axiom that subtends it, functionalism in the communication schema, the link between them being, of course, that the "poetic" is claimed to be a *function* of language— something language does— alongside the phatic, the metalingual, the emotive, the conative, and, of course, the referential. Jakobson does not respect the distinction between *langue* and *parole* as Saussure drew it, and argues against it explicitly in more than one place in the *Selected Writings*. His practice, however, is enough to make the point: a theory of language cannot exclude what language does.

Effectively what happened, then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when structuralism, structuralist poetics, structuralism and literature, and semiotics of everything in sight became what amounted to a movement, was that Eco with architecture and superman, Metz with film, Barthes with fashion, *et. al.* and *et cetera*, were all working on things that Saussure would have excluded from semiology. They were not working on *langue(s)*. The history of saussurian semiotics has at its centre what looks like a contradiction: where Saussure had posited linguistics as a

branch of semiology, the two areas? subjects? disciplines? are now— with notable exceptions— practised by different people in different institutional places, published by different publishers or in different collections, discussed in different conferences and, most interestingly, they are concerned with different kinds of objects. Linguistics has gone on, by and large, with the description of systems (though not necessarily, since Chomsky, with systems of signs), while semiotics has delineated as its special domain texts, codes, and discourses. Or maybe it's not a contradiction; maybe it's just the discovery of what was left in a very famous sentence when the word "sign" was taken for granted: semiology, Saussure predicted, would study *"the life* of signs *within society"*.

So much for one ancestral text and its descendants. You can see that what I've done is to use the name "Saussure" as an emblematic word to designate the project of a semiotics of language (of "code" in the sense of *langue*). Peirce will be used in the same way, but to designate an entirely different project. For where Saussure is a programmatic theory of language, Pierce is a theory of interpretation.

As you know, Saussure's sign is a binary organisation of signifier and signified, because the general concern in saussurian linguistics is with the code as a formal mechanism for conveying meanings, not with the meanings as such. Peirce's sign, on the other hand, is designed in the first place to deal with the structure of meaning as it had been defined by scholastic logic, that is, as reference and sense, extension and intension: reference, or extension, is to do with the set of things to which a description can truly apply; sense, or intension, is to do with what follows from a description. Both definitions of the sign are attached to very old traditions: the saussurian definition is attached, as Jakobson tells us, to the Stoical tradition, and is concerned with how a language makes its significations available; Peirce's definition is concerned with the analysis of those significations for their truth-value (extension) and their implications (intension).

Peirce's definition of the sign is thus triadic: it consists of the sign (also called the representamen; Eco calls it the sign vehicle), its object, and its interpretant. The object corresponds with extension, and the interpretant with intension. There are vast and intricate problems associated with this definition— Peirce is a very complex body of writing, so all one can do with it is simplify: my apologies! —but I shall overlook the difficulties, and assert as follows. There are at least these things designated by the term "object": the object is just what we say we're talking about, the thing that we can point to in order to claim that a description

correspond to it. This means that it is something like the referent, and at the same time, something like the subject of a sentence according to the analysis of a sentence into subject and predicate Given the sentence "Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere", we claim that the sentence is true *of* "Australia"; we could also analyse it as being "about" the Southern Hemisphere, in which case the fact of Australia's being in it is claimed to be true (i.e. asserted) of the "Southern Hemisphere". Given the term "Australia", we could point to it deictically, by saying "here", or by means of a map, and in so doing we would be indicating its referent; and we could also say that the term "Australia" means many of the things we have been saying during this conference: the antipodes, a coast-line surrounding a desert, an island continent, a sunburnt country, an old continent and a new nation, a gold-mine of uranium, and so on, and by doing this, we should be producing its sense. Notice how the reference and sense of a term work in the same way as the subject and predicate of a sentence: the sense and the predicate both *interpret* the sign-of-the-object, and that is what Peirce means by the interpretant. The term "object" also designates something like the "object of knowledge", in the sense in which we say "the object of saussurian linguistics is *langue*", or "the object of peircian semiotics is knowledge", and in this case, the interpretant will be the set of propositions that constitute our knowledge of that object once it is posited.

Peirce is thus concerned with how we attribute meaning to the world by interpreting it, how our interpretations allow us to posit its existence as a set of more or less defined objects, and how the presupposition of those objects allows us to work on the organisation of our interpretations. But notice that the "world" is there; as peircians we don't know what it's like, (although we have lots of ideas about it), but it is crucially what we are trying to deal with. Referring to it is what we have to do to get started on it; interpretation both works from this starting point, and back to it, questioning it and starting again. Sontag in "Against Interpretation" quotes Nietzsche saying "there are no facts, there are only interpretations"; Peirce would say that what we take to be facts are constituted by interpretations.

So a sign is not a unit of language in Peirce; it's the model of the mechanism whereby we constitute knowledge. The meaning of the world is not given and then talked about; it is made by the action of signs. And Peirce always claims that the sign is an hypothesis about the world, something very close to the notion of the simulacrum, whereby we experiment on the world and see whether or not it works.

Further, a hypothesis is the beginning of the syllogistic process, so all interpretations are interpreted by what follows from them. The series of interpretations that is set off in this way is what Peirce calls "semiosis"— you might have come across this word in Kristeva— and what it means is that meaning is produced by signs in continuous action. Semiosis covers, apart from the strict forms of inference, loose inference, dialogue, the relation between, for instance, an imperative and the action that follows it, and, by analogy, the relation between a scientific theory and the experimental method used to test it. According to the principle of semiosis, meaning is produced when a sign interprets another sign: the interpretant sign always follows the sign that it interprets. So no sign is a sign until it is interpreted, and it follows from this that we are not in the realm of the saussurian system of signs available for use, we are in the realm of signs in use. Peirce is concerned with signs doing things to the world and to each other, and I suppose this is discourse. It is consistent with this concern that the distinctions so often made by linguists between "the dictionary" and "the encyclopaedia"— linguistic meaning and pragmatic or scientific meaning— cannot be made within a peircian framework, for there is no room for a special thing called linguistic meaning. Peirce assumes systematically the absolute identity of meaning and knowledge and, when he's wearing his pragmatist hat, of meaning, knowledge, and action.

So much, then, for the second ancestral text. The oppositions between them will all derive from the one that is already apparent: that the sign is for Saussure an item of a code, whereas for Peirce it is an event in the production of knowledge, and that the object for Saussure is the system of signs prior to use, where meaning as such is non-problematic, while for Peirce the object is meaning as use, where the code as such is non-problematic.

The first opposition is between the kind of object that a "sign" is in each. Saussure, although he hesitated without coming to a firm conclusion as to what kind of positive entity a linguistic sign could be, nonetheless was quite certain that it could not be a sentence. A sentence, he opined, was in *parole*, the product of a "free combination" it could not therefore be an item of the linguistic repertoire. But for Peirce, the "logical sentence"— the proposition— is the model for all signs: even terms not in grammatical sentences are treated as quasi-propositions; portraits are propositions in that the name of the subject is taken to be the subject of the proposition, and the portrait itself the description predicated of it. Similarly, geometrical diagrams are construed as propositions, in that spatial relations are taken to be

predicated of points. This opposition entails another: that reference lies outside the sign in Saussure, while it is by definition part of it, in Peirce.

The second opposition is that the sign is a position in a network in Saussure, while for Peirce it is a member of a linear series. There is a spatial metaphor that is quite central to structuralist thinking: the network, the vertical and horizontal axes, and so on— while there is a temporal metaphor that is equally crucial to Peirce: the meaning of a sign is what follows (from) it; and this opposition is related to the importance of the principle of the synchronic in Saussure, and to the absolute non-pertinence of the opposition between the synchronic and the diachronic in Peirce. The theoretical objects of each project derive from this opposition, since the saussurian problem is to get hold of the code: identifying the sameness of a sign through the multiplicity of its uses and the relative plurality of its typical contexts is a practical problem that arises in saussurian linguistics, as is gathering all these (id)entities together in the one place so that the network of relations they enter into with one another can be mapped. The peircian problem is to account for "inquiry", to trace the production of knowledge through the "transformation of signs", and the theoretical problem that this project entails is to give a coherent account of what could be the beginning and the end of this process.

Consequent upon the opposition of the spatial with the temporal metaphor is the opposition between what I might call "content semantics" and "inferential semantics". Content semantics is typical of a structuralist enterprise in which the *signifié* of a sign functions primarily as an identifying mark of the sign: the assumption is that the "meaning" of a sign is "there", contained in or attached to the formal properties. On the other hand, inferential semantics is characteristic of a project that understands meaning as a product of signs in sequence. Not a sequence of signs as would make up a syntactic structure, nor even a sequence of sentences as would make up a textual syntagm, but a sequence of *things said* about a common object: a discourse.

Now it seems that Peirce, at this stage, has the upper hand, that it is he who presupposes a structure that necessarily relates reference with signification, and that it is he who is concerned with discourse, rather than the closed system of a code. But there is no definition of the code in Peirce, no theory of it, despite his assertion that a sign is established by convention; and this means that you can't tell the difference between English and French, in Peirce, nor even the difference between portraiture and

geometry, or architecture and natural language. It is, for this reason, an idealist theory, working on the level of "pure", or worse still, universal, ideas. So there can be no idea of the language-specific nature of signification, no social or cultural or historical parameters to take into account in the theory of interpretation, no relativisation of knowledge. Again, it follows from the absence of a theory of code in Peirce that no way of dealing with the problems that arise from attention to grammatical facts can derive from the generalised application of the model of extension and intension, so the fact that, for instance, natural language but not photography can ask questions and give advice, must pass unnoticed, while to solve the (non)question of the object of a command, Peirce falls back on the notion of intention, despite his insistence elsewhere that his theory of the sign is non-psychological. And thirdly it follows from this absence that there is no theory of the material signifier in Peirce, no way of taking cognizance of the fact that geography and geometry, dance and song, photography and painting, are produced by different kinds of work and do different sorts of things. The model of sense and reference, and the model of inferential semantics, help us to do a great many things, but they assume the continuity, and the ultimate identity, of all signifying practices. And we can't have that.

Similarly, in Saussure: we have the foundation for a theory of codes, and therefore of the diversity and the specificity of signifiers. But there is no way of generating from it a theory of meaning as process, no way— because of the principle of synchronicity and the object *langue*— of talking about what happens between one text and the next, and no way— because of the absence of reference— of talking about the relation of meaning and knowledge, of speaking and the world.

I have put these two ancestral texts side by side in order to claim that semiotics *now* occurs in the space of the absences that each defines in the other. In my reading of current semiotics, there seem to be three ways of dealing with that space. Some people feel the need to choose between Saussure and Peirce: there are authorphilic articles by the hundred whose main aim is to praise or to bury one of the ancestors or, more seriously, to weigh up the pros and cons of both. But in my view, it is not our business to be choosing between programmatic theories written at the turn of the century, nor to upbraid an ancestor for the theoretical choices he did not make.

A second way of doing semiotics now is to synthesise the two: this is Jakobson's position, and to some extent Eco's, and you will find...hm... echos of it in a great deal of work that follows them.

Jakobson in particular seems to be interesting in this respect, because what he does is to loosen up some saussurian principles with peircian ideas. Thus, the arbitrary nature of the sign is contested by means of Peirce's theories of the index ("Shifters and the Russian Verb") and of the icon ("Quest for the Essence of language"); the idea of the relation between signifier and signified (Jakobson calls them the *signans* and the *signatum*) is altered by the peircian idea that the meaning of a sign is always a "translation", that is, is produced by a second sign; and for Jakobson as for Peirce, anything made of language— from the distinctive feature to the whole poem, counts as a sign. Since the major part of Jakobson's work has been in phonology, and on the formal properties of the signifier, this major gap in Peirce would seem to be eliminated. But it is precisely at this point that we can see that the work of synthesis depends upon the use of isolated ideas from one in terms of the project of the other: there is no question that Jakobson's project is, in some general sense, saussurian, that its point is to produce a theory of language, not to describe what we say. The elimination of the peircian project from Jakobson's work becomes clear when you consider that he retains the bipartite theory of the sign typical of saussurian work, such that the *signatum* covers indiscriminately both the object and the interpretant. This reduces what I take to be the crucial distinction between them, leaving us back where we started: that which is distinctive about the notion of the object is relegated outside the sign, and is, indeed, deemed irrelevant to a theory of language, so that reference and signification are separated, while that which is distinctive about the interpretant, the temporal dimension of the production of meaning, is missing altogether, leaving the theory of interpretation and the transformation of signs dependent on something that smells very like content semantics on the one hand, and "translation" by another item in the static network on the other. Jakobson's formalism thus evacuates the theory of knowledge from the domain of semiotics.

A third position one can take with respect to the space defined by these two texts is to say that it defines the possibility of a set of questions, that it is the space of a problematic in which, willy-nilly, most of the interesting work that's being done now is taking place. In this way I can situate Jakobson's project, which is a different thing from following Jakobson's line; and in the same vein, I wish to talk a little about Benveniste and about Foucault— specifically, the Foucault of the *Archeology of Knowledge*, —as being defined by this space, for Benveniste produces a linguistic theory of discourse, and Foucault takes on the task of describing what is said, as a way of supplanting the project of a history of ideas.

The reason why it's useful to talk about Benveniste and Foucault together is that I think that the concept of discourse that Foucault uses is largely made possible by the linguistic theory of discourse developed by Benveniste. While there is nowhere in Benveniste the slightest suggestion of the specificities of the "discursive formation", and while the speaker remains in the work of the linguist the expressive individual, it is nonetheless the case that Benveniste defines "discourse" as the product of a speaking position, that meaning is marked off from the *signifié*, that what is said is problematised as something other than a mere "combination" of signs. The theory of the sign is no longer deemed adequate to account for "the life of signs in society". It is true to say that for Benveniste, for a sign to "live in society", it has to become something other than a sign.

Benveniste is aware that the "sign" is not a thing in a thing called language, but a piece of a theory; that that theory is the theory of *langue*, and that the "sign" serves the purpose in it of being a form produced by the appropriate methods of analysis, such that the set of signs and the system will be mutually entailed. For this reason, Benveniste defines the signified not as a meaning that can be examined, but as one of the ways that the sign is identified as itself and no other. The sign cannot, for this reason, account for meaning, or form the basis of an account of it. Meaning, on the other hand, is the defining characteristic of discourse; discourse is made of propositions— reference and sense; and in order to enter into the propositional structure, a sign is considered as a propositional function. Referring is the job of the mechanism of the *énonciation*— the "stating mechanism"—: the pronoun "I" defines what is "here" and "now", so as to establish the "there" and "then", thereby organising both the spatial and the temporal relations between the speaking and the spoken about. This special function of "I" as the nexus of linguistic space-time coordinates— the tense structures, the indicative pronouns (this and that), adverbs of time and place, articles— is responsible for what we call utterance-based reference, as distinct from theories of reference that depend on denotation. It is the grammar of reference that shows, at any point of a stretch of discourse, what objects are being described by what predicates: that is, how language is dealing with the world, *what* world it is dealing with. It is the other aspects of the énonciation which allow us to talk about the position the speaking subject occupies with respect to those descriptions. A lot of people have claimed that Benveniste provides a theory of the subject, but I should like to contest that reading. The theory of "I" is the premise for the theory of the énonciation, and

the theory of the énonciation is a necessary postulate for this theory of reference. The point of Benveniste's work is not to define the speaking subject: it is to show what is necessary to a theory of discourse in order to show how discourse takes hold of its world.

A terminological point is in order here. I have been using the French form "énonciation", although I could have rendered it an enunciation, firstly because "enunciation" has terrible memories of elocution for me, and secondly because translation of Foucault and Benveniste have been, on this particular point, exceptionally misleading. You will remember that an important concept in Foucault is the "statement", the rather difficult to define "unit" of discourse that is neither the proposition (in the strict logical sense), nor the sentence (in the strict syntactic sense), and is certainly not a sign. The statement is "what-is-said-about-something", and discursive formations are made up of complexes of "statements" in certain specifiable relations with one another. Now, "statement" is, in the French, an *énoncé*: this is the past participle form of the verb *énoncer*, and it works in the same way as that other famous gerundive past participle, the signified. The term *énonciation* comes from the same verb, and means "the process of stating": an *énoncé* is the product of an *énonciation*, but this nexus is broken in English by their translations, respectively, as "statement" and "enunciation". To consider a sentence in a scientific treatise as an *énoncé* is to treat it as the product of a speaking position, and to treat that speaking position as able to be read off from the statement.

You can read about deixis and utterance-based reference in plenty of places (for instance Fillmore and Lyons), but what is special about Benveniste is that he uses his theory of the énonciation to carve out a new domain of enquiry. And while his theory is certainly not adequate to account for the foucaldian enterprise, it does account for precisely one of the aspects of Foucault's work that makes the difference between a history of ideas and a history of discourses. The following quote was overheard on a famous occasion recently: "Every time I say 'discourse' it can be taken as 'knowledge'" this is a misreading of Foucault precisely because it overlooks entirely the fact that a discourse is the product of a stating, that a statement is a grammatical object made of language which can be taken to be the "sign" of a proposition, with assumptions and assertions about what, at a given epistemic point, can be taken to be the world, and that a statement entails, by definition, the position of the speaking subject vis-á-vis that world. But it is an equally serious misreading only to take account of the linguistic

component of the notion of discourse and to claim that Foucault is a "linguistic structuralist". To do so is to succumb to the temptations of that familiar dichotomy of language vs. the world, and perhaps more seriously, to suppose that all linguistics involves the elimination of the referent. Precisely what seems interesting to me is that, one from the point of view of linguistics, the other from the point of view of describing what is said, both Benveniste and Foucault occur at the conjuncture of the problems of speaking, language, and the description of the world. And if it is the case that the world is the product of our descriptions, then the narrative theorists were not right, who wished us to separate description from action, and the speaking position becomes the position of the exercise of power. But this is another question, for another time if not another place.

THE LOST WAVE

semiotics, desire and cultural vanguardism

Ted Colless

swept away

Don't get me wrong. This is not a matter of re-evaluating the avant-garde, as though with the appearance of semiotics it had undergone some profound transformation in its strategies over the past decade that has left us speechless and in need of an analyst. Nor is it a lament for the passing away of a vital tradition of the new that needs to be re-read to resurrect its forgotten or repressed destiny. The simple story is that all the shooting off about post-modernity, post-movementism, transversalism, nomadic desire and semiotic delinquency is the banal re-run of a vanguardism that, even in its heyday, was nothing but a useful fiction of speed for a history that has futurised itself into a terminal concussive stability, the intransigent escalationof global security.

the sargasso sea

We have been told so often these days to look on the bright side of alienation. To see it as not just the fearful breakdown and painful loss of identity, but also to welcome it as a liberating indifference of man towards his work and work towards its man, the indifference of the experience of being decoded by exchange value; and that this indifference deconstructs psychic and political intelligibility by opening us onto perpetually mobile, fluid identities, an endless play of multiplicities, a semiotic sea. And that any attitude that settles for anything less than unbounded, unregulated experimentation is purist, is assertive, is erecting a general, is crippling desire, is— gasp— oedipal. Writing the writerly, labouring for weeks in a collective bid to produce an editorial that "said nothing" lest its suicidal authors be taken as unrepentant phallocrats; or spending days trying to

mark unreadable collages submitted by those astute students who could use the essay as a machine-of-war against the institution that positioned them as astute students: but any feelings of futility would be of course a reactionary enclosure of the freeing de-definition of one's institutional identity, would not only mean being a killjoy but also— gasp— conservative. So where did the de-centred radicalism flow when the heavyweight ring of philosophical debate was deterritorialised? To the museums to delight in the "radically pluralist" assemblages of Rauschenberg and Merce Cunningham, to listen to the "sterile intensities" of John Cage's random open-endedness, to toy with the "erotic deferral" of Duchamp's paradoxes, to celebrate the "hyperreal" serialism of Andy Warhol's society portraiture, to be "spaced out" by a numbing minimalism, to grin at the conceptual artists' "simulation" of corporate management processes. Even to us lightweights this kind of clucking would come as a big bore if it weren't for a shudder of recognition of the same alliance between an "aesthetic of indifference" and a "politics of resignation" that has hung around since the Cold War. For that fascinated passivity, that passionate endistancing of assemblage, environmental and pop art was not simply an infatuation with the experience of being subjugated by corporate power, it carried the quiet longing for an imaginary totalitarianism that was east of the Wall: *"I want to be a machine."* One can't help but be cynical of the buoyant rhetoric of crisis staged by an avant-garde of semiotics whose *"desire represents nothing save the open ended investment of libidinal flows in the social process"*, whose "force" is "undistributed...pure liquid inflexion": the same project of accelerating abstraction crucial to post-war American modernism? The same fantasia on consumerist freedom? The same story, from "the end of ideology" to the "post-political"?

lover come back

How often, through the soap-opera scores of liberation droning out of exhausted guitars and amplifiers, did we have to listen to the same croaking invocation of that great mystic underground of subversives: dadaists, surrealists, beats, hippies, punks...even conceptual artists. A procession of ultra modern youth whose only banner is a nostalgic appeal to lost essences, to primal energies: Beneath the paving stones, the beach..., or, Lover come back! Delinquents slumming it in the nightlife of Alphaville, and dreaming of busting up the prose of a techno-symbolic order

with their psychotic love poetry. Meanwhile, those of us who always had to listen to the visionary prayers because there seemed nowhere else to go, and because it might have looked reactionary to interrupt the trance, those of us who might have noticed the wink of an eye passing between the fugitive and his cop to keep the roadblock weak enough for the story to be serialised, we might have recognised that there's no highway out of the city of the night, the capital of pain, that isn't a highway back in, into a city that is made up only of highways...fictions of speed that make us think the big sleep of modernity is only a bad dream.

the road to rio

To take a trip, to break through, to evade, to go elsewhere. Of course, it's to trace a line, a line of flight. It sure sounds good. And that's about the value of it when all we really want to do is have it on playback, parlayed into memory: to write about the trip or have it written about, make movies about it or have them made for us, to make money from it or have money made from it, and to pick up a little fame, like a randy hitch-hiker, along the way. The favourite stories of nomad desire plot their transgressive heroes' escapes from the ego traps differently to some extent: cutting across history and the social field against the grain, or swimming transversally with the rip tides, or indifferently bumming a ride on the flows. But no matter how much hard work is put into the pleasures and pains of the journey, whether as passenger or driver— and for all the cultural and political ransacking, gold-digging and vandalism that goes on— where it really *happens* is in Rio, at the terminus of the career. All these lines of flight do indeed have destinations marked out in advance— sunny paradises of freedom in Fame. Perhaps not as lucrative as Ronnie Biggs's, not as sensual as Gauguin's, not as exciting as Rimbaud's, not as apocalyptic as Sid Vicious's; and maybe there's not just one of these targets waiting for you, like Charles Manson's cell or Van Gogh's asylum, but no matter how many trips you make or how few, it still comes down to being spectacular in the replay, and the living death in that cell will be multiplied in countless, mobile reminiscences, rumours and re-evaluations. You are doomed to capitalise on your liberation.

showroom dummies

This destiny is formed in the frozen poise of words, of looks, of

actions— images trapped on the event horizon of a heteronomy that doesn't exist. It is an avant-garde that can only produce stars, its dynamic is that of opportunism, its mode of organisation that of display, of exhibition. Take a look at the portrait gallery spaced out along the road in Tim Burns' *Against the Grain*, or do a slow pan across the Foreign Bodies conference, or across a meeting at Side FX: an eclectic mix of slurred speech and witty articulateness, of excitability and reticence, of manic violence and dalliance, of catatonic gaze and piercing insight, of punk and hippie, of blitz and spiv, of academe and unemployment...playing these off against each other as if to signify nothing but mobility, extension, the disassembling of style. But this stardom embodies the very irony that immobilises this avant-garde, that makes it a *gestureless movement*. For the moment let's say, using familiar theoretical fodder, that the dynamic of stardom here is more like the biography of a black hole: the centres of attention are only identifiable by the frozen cluster of words, looks, gestures, bodies and stories around them; words, looks and so on that are forever falling into a dead invisible singularity that lies at the heart of fame. That's where the flight takes you. That's it, the end of the story; and the hyper-modern delinquency is just one great catalogue of poise, a spectacle of uncommited control, its dissolute and dispersed identity is that of a meta-dandy. Passion is fashion, and intensity is only a matter of style.

the salon-without-walls

Another fiction of speed: the romance of itinerant labour. Crossing and recrossing the domains of academic employment (as students, researchers, teachers) and the dole queue, an experience real enough for most of us to flinch at its mention, is made spectacular in form as a deterritorialisation of educational institutions and the opening of new mobile, unstructured, discontinuous, fluid forms of learning. I remember at Side FX once how it took over an hour before anyone piped up to call the huge meeting on alternative information networks to order. It was a provocative act since there were as many centres to the meeting as there were people attending it, and many of those had schizophrenized well ahead of the night. And then, after another hour of vagabond speeches denouncing the oedipal and authoritarian nature of any meeting structured by punctilious speech, a woman actually came to the point:

—Is it true you are organising a reading group on the subject of blah blah?

—I'd prefer to see a group organise itself on that subject.

—Well I'd like to be in it. Where and when will it meet?

—That's up to the group to decide.

—So where's the group?

—I don't think any are here tonight.

—Then can't you tell me about it?

—Look, the last thing I want to do is play the leader. I have to do that all day at university.

Further cross-examination revealed that some five such groups had already organised themselves before the meeting, back in the institutions, and one of them was so well organised it was already a closed affair. Strolling off to a bar afterwards it seemed to us the movement had staged its finale: demobilisation.

Conference Postscript

George Alexander

The timing of the Foreign Bodies conference was apt. It arrived at a time when Australia is reaching a cusp of sorts. First, between the forces of down-home nativism and the forces of satellite internationalism. That's to say, on the one hand between the demagogic fiction of national community-as-Private Property; on the other hand, the idea that our country is a prime piece of real-estate for global military scenarios.

It marked, in other words, a renewed self-consciousness about how our cultural industry was going, and the trade politics of importing and exporting ideas.

Secondly, it called for a middle ground —or rather, an agency for crossing borders, between here and there; and called for what we have been lacking in Australia, writer-critics. People who could see literature as more than just a sandbox activity and who could take criticism out of its clenched and cerebral jargon.

The week long conference, then, was a small-scale investigation into otherness.

To begin with, what does that elusive barbed-wire of consonants — "semiotics" mean? Very broadly, it is a cross-disciplinary study of the nature of sign-systems. It can analyse just about any cultural phenomena in terms of processes of communication. If everything in our mediated and commodity-saturated environment can be seen as a sign, then not only literature, but even social action can be read as a text. And it was one of the insistences of the conference, that reducing things to texts and discourses did not mean leaving them in an academic vaccuum: rather, texts emerge as cultural objects produced from the human struggle to control, organise and diffuse them.

In Europe (mainly France and Italy), and the United States, this powerful critical tool —powerful because it is one of the least

partisan instruments for understanding our situation, and our own rhetoric about it— has been immobilized as an objective scientific method. Happily in Australia it is still open territory and outside institutions. And one of the purposes of the Conference was to prevent it from becoming a permanently-imprisoned immanent understanding for a bunch of white-coated lab. technicians. What mattered to us, was not to make-see, but to make do. How can we apply it, here and now. Whether teaching Patrick White, or writing a chapter for the Bicentennial volume on Australian history, or analysing political events as intermedia performances.

The contributors to the Foreign Bodies conference, isolated in their respective cities and university departments, were anxious to set up sights, goals, targets, and there was no easily reached consensus. The metaphorics of the desert —with Australia as an empty signifier, whose referent is in the future of the sign, not its past— left the inevitable whiff of the void. Symptomatically it led us through a few frozen silences and communication-failures. But the compound solution of the interested parties began to settle towards the end of the week, with a growing willingness to put up a front, at least, of *esprit of corps,* that feels commonly it is on the verge of "something else". Perhaps today, marginal and eccentric, but not doctrinaire or elitist.

The call for a middle ground — or better, a network where a number of hyphenated interests could find expression, was in some way met by the Conference itself. By simply existing this event expands the possibility of obliterating usual academic lines. With many writers, critics, disaffiliated intellectuals together in one place, a new sense of cultural politics was felt and given a valid field of action.

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